ORATURE AND YORÙBÁ RIDDLES

AKÍNTÚNDÉ AKÍNYẸMÍ

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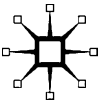

ORATURE AND YORÙBÁ RIDDLES
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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-50262-9
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First published in 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-69958-2 ISBN 978-1-137-50263-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137502636

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: April 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Bólú and her brother, Tọ̀míwá—
the bridge between the past and the future.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A scholarly work like this cannot represent a single person's ingenuity. Indeed, most of the riddles and scholarly citations and arguments I respond to in this book belong to others—communities, ancestors, living elders, scholarly peers—and I acknowledge all those before me upon whose shoulders I stand. I owe a debt of gratitude to the numerous riddle performers that I worked with during my fieldwork for granting me the permission to freely observe and record their performances. To some of these riddle scholars who have passed on, may their gentle souls rest in perfect peace; and to those who are still alive and active, may they be satisfied that their scholarship on riddles, often derided and called "minor genre" is making history in its own right.

During the course of working on this book many organizations and individuals lent a helping hand, and I would like to thank all those who shared their resources, expertise, and valuable time with me. At the University of Florida in Gainesville, I acknowledge with gratitude the summer research grants and generous travel funds that I received from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; the Center for African Studies; and the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. I am also grateful for the Faculty Enhancement Opportunity fellowship offered to me by Office of the President, University of Florida, in fall of 2012 and for the course release through that fellowship that gave me time to conduct the final phase of my fieldwork in Nigeria, Republic of Benin, and Togo. At the Kwara State University, Màléte in Nigeria, I would like to thank most sincerely Professor Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, the vice-chancellor and chief executive of the university; Professor Abíọ́lá Ìrèlé, the former provost of College of Humanities, Management and Social Science; and Professor Nikẹ Lawal, the chair of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages and her staff for hosting me on their

campus in fall of 2012 when I was in Nigeria for the concluding part of my field researchwork on this book.

Colleagues and friends whose generous collegiality moved this project along, because they criticized versions of different parts of the book at conferences over the past few years, include Professor Adélékè Adéẹ̀kọ́ (The Ohio State University, Columbus), Professor Karin Barber (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom), Professor Tóyìn Fálọlá (University of Texas at Austin), Professor Tẹjúmọ́lá Ọláníyan (UW-Madison), Professor Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith (University of Nebraska at Omaha), Professor Akinloyè Òjó (University of Georgia, Athens), and Dr Kọ́léadé Odùtọ́lá (University of Florida, Gainesville). I am indebted to them especially for patiently discussing their opposing views with me and for recommending many texts that have proved quite helpful in the course of my research. Likewise, several other scholars at the meetings of African Literature Association (ALA), International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA), and Southeast African Languages and Literature Forum (SEALLF) in the last six years, listened to me while I present some of the ideas in this book. I want to thank these scholars (too many to be listed here) for their constructive criticisms and suggestions that helped to sharpen my ideas. To the anonymous peer-reviewers who provided insightful comments and helpful recommendations in their reports, I also offer my deep gratitude.

I have always had an interesting social life, thanks to the members of my immediate constituency in the United States—the Nigerian Community and the Africa Microchurch of the Greenhouse Church, both in Gainesville, and my "Nàìjá" friends and colleagues in the American Association of Teachers of Yorùbá (AATY) and African Languages Teachers Association (ALTA). In Nigeria is also another network, although I can only thank a few: Bọ́lá and Ezekiel Adígbóle, Bíọ́lá and Ṣọ̀lá Aṣà, Yẹ́misí and Lékan Sánní, Bọ́lájí and Ṣọ̀lá Ajíbádé, Dúpẹ́ and Adémọ́lá Òkétúndé, Yétúndé and Ṣọ̀lá Owónibí, Táíwò Olúnládé, Dúró Adélékè, Àrìnpé Adéjùmọ̀, Adémọ́lá Ọdẹ́tókun, and Akin Àlàó.

I also wish to express my appreciation to project staff and others at Palgrave Macmillan in the United States, especially Brigitte Shull, head of Humanities, Scholarly Division and senior editor, Literature and Gender Studies; Kristin Purdy, editor, History; Mike Aperauch, editorial assistant History/African Studies; and Abby Ọládipọ̀, production assistant for their enthusiastic support and immense encouragement. I am similarly grateful to other members of the production crew at the publisher's headquarters—copy editor, proofreaders, designers, typesetters, and others who worked behind the scenes and invisible to me—for seeing this work into print with skill and extraordinary efficiency.

Most of all, I would like to thank my wife, Ìkẹ́ and our children—Bólú and Tọ̀míwá—most sincerely for their support and love. If most authors thank their family for coping with neglect, mine is a different experience: everybody in the family is always busy, without time to complain! I can only wish that in and by this and past efforts, I have proved myself a worthy role model you have always wanted me to be.

Quotations of riddle excerpts from published works of the following authors appear with permission of the holders of various copyrights.

1. The poem "Ẹ̀là Lọ̀rọ̀" in Ọlátúndé O. Ọlátúnjí, Ed. *Ewì Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí (Ìwé Kíní)*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited, 1982a, by permission of Heinemann Educational Books, Nigeria.
2. The story "Aádámù àti Eéfà" in Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, *Fàbú: Àkójọpọ̀ Àwàdà*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): DB Martoy Books, 2008, by permission of DB Martoy Books (Nigeria).
3. A storytelling session in *A Treasury of Childhood Memories*, unpublished manuscript by Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith, being a translation of the Yorùbá novel *Ogún Ọmọdé* written by Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá and published by the University Press Plc. Ìbàdàn, 1990, by permission of Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith and University Press Plc. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria).
4. An illustration of the intersection of the common features of "vehicle" and "tenor" in metaphor adapted from Ọlabiyi Yáì, "Some Structural Aspects of Yorùbá *Àlọ́ Àpamọ̀*." *Seminar Series Part II*, Ed. Ọlásopé Oyèláràn. Ilé-Ifẹ̀ (Nigeria), Department of African Languages and Literatures, University of Ifẹ̀, 1977, p. 449, by permission of Department of African Languages and Literatures, University of Ifẹ̀ (now Department of Linguistics and African Languages, Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Nigeria).

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NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION OF YORÙBÁ DATA

The task of transcribing and translating oral material has been rendered rather challenging by the ethnopoetic revolution of the 1970s, which has demanded of scholars a considerable faith in their representation of texts they collect from oral artists, poets, singers, and storytellers, in such a way as to respect the orality of the enterprise and thus the accuracy of the material. Therefore, it will be appropriate to comment briefly on the method of transcription and translation adopted in this study. I have attempted to transcribe the data collected from the field between 2007 and 2012 as accurately as possible, using the Standard Yorùbá Orthography. The orthography adopted is phonemic, which allows as much as possible for adequate representation of all recorded phonemic sounds. I have utilized commas and semi-colons to delineate the line endings and breath pauses in the original delivery as recommended by Ọlátúndé Ọlatúnjí (1984: 13). However, due to space limitation, not all Yorùbá data are included in the book. For instance, while narrations of tale-riddles are presented only in English translation, regular riddles, poetic riddles, and song-riddles are presented in both original Yorùbá version and English translation.

It is important that non-Yorùbá speakers and nonacademic readers of this book are familiar with the orthographic guide—an English comparison, a mere approximation of the Yorùbá sounds—that I used in preparing the Yorùbá texts in the book. Hopefully, this will assist such readers in the pronunciation of the cultural nuggets that follow:

Consonants: Consonants sounds are approximately similar in pronunciation in both Yorùbá and English except the following:

{gb} which should be pronounced together with emphasis on the "*b*" to produce a sound like a thud [g͡b]—for example, *gbogbo* and *ìgbàgbọ́*
{p} which should be pronounced as [k͡p] together to produce a forceful "p" sound as in *pátápátá*.
{ṣ} which should be pronounced like the "*sh*" in the English word "should"—for example, *òrìṣà*
{y} which should be pronounced like a "*y*" in the English word "you"—for example, *Yorùbá*.

The following English alphabets are however absent in Yorùbá: {c, q, v, x, z}.

Vowels: There are two types of vowels in Yorùbá: nonnasalized (oral vowels) and nasalized vowels. The nonnasalized (oral) vowels are written as {a, e, ẹ, i, o, ọ, u}.

{a} shoud be pronounced like the "*a*" in "***a***pple"—for example, *àṣà* and *adé*
{e} should be pronounced like the "*a*" in "***a***ge"—for example, *èdè* and *ewé*
{ẹ} should be pronounced like the "*e*" in "***e***gg"—for example, *ẹgbẹ́* and *àjẹ́*
{i} should be pronounced like the "*e*" in "***e***vening"—for example, *ilé* and *ìlú*
{o} should be pronounced like the "*o*" in "***o***ld"—for example, *odò* and *ìgò*
{ọ} should be pronounced like the "*aw*" in "***aw***e" or the "*o*" in "dog"—for example, *ọmọ* and *ọ̀dọ́*
{u} should be pronounced like the "*u*" in "f***u***ll"—for example, *Yorùbá* and *ibùdó*

Nasalized vowels are produced by adding the consonant [n] to an oral vowel symbol {that is, an, ọn, in, ẹn, un} except where such a symbol is preceded by the consonant [m] or [n] (e.g., "*ọmọ*" [child] or "*ọ̀nà*" [path])

The syllabic structure in Yorùbá language consists of either a vowel, for example, {a} (we) and {i} in "*ilé*" (house); a consonant followed by a vowel, for example, "*mu*" (drink), or a syllabic nasal, for example, "*ń*" in "*ń lọ*" (S/he is going). Consequently, any word in Yorùbá having more than one syllable may be described in terms of the combination of the

types of syllable above, for example, *òrìṣà* = *ò-rì-ṣà*—a lesser god/deity—(vowel, consonant + vowel, consonat + vowel) and *àṣà* = *à-ṣà*—culture/tradition—(vowel, consonant + vowel). Each syllable in Yorùbá bears one of the three tones in the language: high—acute—{ó}, low—grave—{ò}, or mid—{o} (usually left unmarked).

In order to ensure consistency in the use of diacritics or tone marks in this book, the following is a list of style rules that we adopted for Yorùbá words: (i) capital initials but no italics for all tone-marked proper nouns, including but not limited to personal names, names of animal charaters in folktales and tale-riddles, names of cities, societies, and associations or organizations, for example, Akíndélé, Ìjàpá, Yorùbá, Ògún, Ìbàdàn, Ẹgbẹ́ Àgbà ò Tán, and the like; (ii) italics and tone marks (but no capital initials) for titles that are not part of proper nouns listed in (i above) for example, *òrìṣà, baálẹ̀, àfin, ọba,* and the like; (iii) italics and tone marks for shorter sample of Yorùbá riddle texts embedded in body of work, but with no quotation marks; and (iv) longer Yorùbá riddle texts are italicized, tone marked, and indented.

As for the English translation of the Yorùbá data in the book, I have attempted to strike a compromise between a literal and a literary translation, although many words in Yorùbá frustrate translingual transportation by the sheer complexity of their polysemic range. Such words are so culture bound that they do not translate easily to English, especially when their metaphysical polyvalence in Yorùbá has no equivalent in English. Therefore, my English translation of Yorùbá data in this book yields place to mediation as I am constrained to try out or devise a series of strategies of transposition and transference, which in the words of Níyì Ọ̀ṣúndáre (2000) leads to "kiss and quarrel" between the concerned languages (15). According to him, when two languages meet, they kiss and quarrel. They achieve a tacit understanding on the common grounds of similarity and convergence, then negotiate, often through strident rivalry and self-preserving altercations, their areas of dissimilarity and divergence.

Translation, in the context of what I presented in this study, means literally "carrying across," and this implies all other forms that carry the prefix *trans-*. It also means not only transportation or transmission or transposition but also transformation and transmutation, for all these activities take place when translating literary material in an African language to the English language. My approach to the notion of translation should be seen first in the orthodox sense as the linguistic operation that consists in transporting meaning from one language to another. However, as Anuradha Dingwaney (1995) points out, if translation is one of the primary means by which texts produced in one or another indigenous language of the various countries arbitrarily grouped together under the "Third," or non-Western, world

are made available in Western, metropolitan languages, it is not restricted to such linguistic transfer alone. For Dingwaney (1995), "translation is also the vehicle" through which "Third World cultures (are made to) travel—transported or "borne across" to and recuperated audiences in the West" (4). Unfortunately, most Western-oriented, linguistic-based translation theories are not applicable or relevant to Yorùbá oral texts because of the multiplicity of meanings usually attached to specific words in the language. The major weakness of these theories is that they do not take into consideration underlying sociocultural factors in works produced by Africans. A consideration of these factors in African-language literature will produce what Kwame Appiah (1993) has called "thick translation" and which he defines as "a translation that seeks ...to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context ...A description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves ...to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others" (817–818).

It is this form of translation, which Wọlé Ṣóyínká employs in translating the work of the eminent Yorùbá creative writer Daniel Ọlọ́runfẹ́mi Fágúnwà (1968), that I also employed in my English translation of Yorùbá riddles in this book. In his assessment of Fágúnwà's works, Abíọ́lá Ìrèlé (1981) notes that "Fágúnwà's works belong then to the great tradition of allegorical and symbolic literature, set within the framework of a particular complex of cultural references. His achievement resides in his creation of a form in which the Yorùbá imaginative tradition can be given a translation in modern terms, and in the process acquired new vitality" (182). I opted for this form of translation because what Ìrèlé alludes to as "cultural references" in Fágúnwà's works also permeate the Yorùbá riddles discussed in this book.

Consequently, my translation of Yorùbá enigmas in this book sets out to capture the spirit and depth of the riddles in English by striking a compromise between a literal and a literary translation. The translation is based on a free but not entirely literal approach keeping to the sense of the Yorùbá original as much as possible. This allows some of the devices used in the Yorùbá original to come up to the surface in the English version. This method of translation is mid-way between a purely literal and a fine translation. My intention was to produce an English text that will be enjoyable and accessible to a diverse audience, including but not limited to students and scholars of African linguistics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science, religion, and folklore. Precedence was thus given to accuracy, clarity, simplicity, effectiveness, and faithfulness in my translation. All translations in this work are mine except where specified.

Introduction

This book takes readers into the hitherto unexplored undercurrents of one of the so-called minor genres of African orature—riddles. There is no existing critical work on this subject among the Yorùbá, a major ethnic group in Africa, with established connections with the black diaspora in North America and the Caribbean. The strength of the Yorùbá as the focus of the study is impressive indeed: a rich oral and written culture; a large and diverse population; and an integrated rural-urban society. Conclusions from this study are intended to inform other studies, and certain general principles from this study are expected to influence studies of similar societies in Africa and elsewhere.

Orature is that vast field of knowledge in which cultural information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to the next. It is a complex corpus of oral arts created to recall, honor, and preserve the past. On occasion, the term *orature* is used interchangeably with oral tradition, oral literature, and folklore or storytelling elements—language and belief systems shared by a common group. It is a verbal legacy contributing significantly to cultural and national identity. In contemporary usage, orature is reflected in popular and group-oriented cultural expressions.

Orature is governed by certain characteristic features—including the situation or context in which it is produced, the audience, language, and structure or format. A primary feature of orature, which relates to the nature of performance, is community involvement (both in the creative and critiquing processes). Each performance is for and about the audience. The main objective of the performer is to entertain, amuse, and impress the audience so as to earn praise, admiration, and, on occasion, material gifts. In creative performance, members of the audience neither listen silently nor wait for the invitation of the performer before joining

in. Instead, the audience spontaneously interjects, queries, and comments. In her assessment of the importance of performance in African verbal arts, Ruth Finnegan (1970) stresses that a "full appreciation must depend on an analysis not only of the verbal interplay and overtones in the piece, its stylistic structure and content, but also of the various detailed devices which the performer has at his disposal to convey his product to the audience" (13).

The continent of Africa holds an immense and diverse reservoir of verbal arts that may be classified in two categories: literary and historical. The literary category includes poetic genres such as praise poetry, sacred chants, songs, and verbal formulae like incantations, parables, riddles, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs. The historical category includes narrative forms steeped in myth, legend, folktale, and epic traditions. Africa is home to about 1,500 of the (over) 6,000 languages spoken in the world today, and many of these languages are used mostly in the oral, unwritten form. Given the plurality of languages in Africa and the primacy of oral communication, it is no surprise that the bulk of literary activity on the continent today occurs in oral media.

Impetus for African oral tradition scholarship developed as a result of several factors: renewed interest in European folklore studies in the late nineteenth century (which included publication of works on oral epics from Finland and other Scandinavian countries) and the outset of European colonialism in Africa. Isidore Okpewho (1992) has detailed the various disciplines that influenced early studies of African oral tradition, including anthropology, ethnology, and folklore (3–9). However, many of the European collectors of African folklore had no interest in the literary value of the materials they gathered. Rather, these collectors were primarily concerned with African belief systems and ideological issues. The first significant African initiative in oral tradition scholarship occurred in 1921 with the founding of the *Journal of Bantu Studies*, jointly published by the University of Cape Town and University of Witwaterstrand in South Africa. The journal remained in print from 1921 to 1941 and laid the foundation for serious academic study of African verbal arts. At the time, though, the term popularly applied was "native literature" or "vernacular literature."

From the 1930s, the Negritude Movement encouraged enthusiastic collection of African folklore and oral tradition by Africans themselves. The leading intellectuals of this effort in the French-speaking countries included Leopold Sedar Senghor and David Diop of Senegal. The Negritude effort dovetailed into the anticolonial resurgence of the 1940s and this activist impetus generated further recordings of materials

concerning oral poetry, epic narratives, and associated genres. The London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), along with its French, German, and Belgian counterparts, also supported field research of African traditions. By the 1970s, the Oxford Library of African Literature had published dozens of titles based on these collections. In the same vein, a resurgent spirit of nationalism resulting from the 1960s independence movements in many African nations stirred interest in folklore and traditional knowledge. Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa* was perhaps the most ambitious attempt to provide a continental coverage of the varieties of genres at the time.

Okpewho (1992) rightly observed that a "major advance in the study…came when native African scholars began to undertake research into the oral traditions of their own people" (12). Among the pioneers of this new wave were Adébóyè Babalọlá of Nigeria, Djibril T. Niane of Senegal, and Kwabena Nketia of Ghana. Okpewho ranks Babalọlá as one of "the first African scholars to revolutionize the study of oral literature," especially in his book titled *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá*. The trend set by Nketia and Babalọlá in the field of oral poetry was followed in other parts of the continent.

In spite of the commendable efforts of African scholars and researchers to diligently collect, transcribe, translate, interpret, and publish African riddles, stories, songs, poems, proverbs, folktales, and so on, numerous genres remain on the brink of extinction. At first glance, there seems little anyone can do to change what appears to be, after all, the natural order of things. The good news, however, is that various African governments, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations have begun taking steps to keep alive unique traditions, through encouraging and sponsoring folk troupes, as well as by regularly promoting festivals where master folk artists may demonstrate their skills.

It is worth noting that the international community has been inexorably coming to the realization that these cherished traditions are indeed at risk, and are beginning to identify the forces that threaten their extinction. Several measures have already been set in place to ensure aggressive documentation of folkloric materials in Africa and throughout the world. For instance, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at its meeting in October 17, 2003, recalled an earlier "Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," and subsequently put into place a convention (in April 2006) with the specific purpose of safeguarding that heritage. The convention had in mind those "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts

and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage"—a heritage that is manifested in various domains, especially the "oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage" and the "performing arts" (Okpewho, 2007: viii). To ensure the successful safeguarding of this heritage, UNESCO recommended the establishment of organizations large and small, meeting at various levels to prepare instruments supporting awareness of the need to preserve their time-honored traditions. The convention also established a fund, solicited from a variety of sources, to aid the achievement of its stated objectives.

As if responding directly to UNESCO's challenge, the Sabah Oral Literature Project established in 1986 by Dr. G. N. Appell and Laura W. R. Appell of the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, to collect, preserve, and translate the oral literature of the various peoples of northern Sabah in Malaysia, broadening its scope in 2009 and metamorphosed into World Oral Literature Project: Voices of Vanishing Worlds. The project's website describes its role as "an urgent initiative to document and make accessible endangered oral literatures before they disappear without record." The first phase of the project provides small grants to fund the collection of oral literature, with particular focus on the peoples of Asia and the Pacific, and on areas of cultural disturbance. The project aspires to become a permanent center for the appreciation and preservation of oral literature, collaborating with and supporting local communities to document their own unique narratives. It also hopes to publish a library of oral texts and occasional papers, and to make the collections accessible through new media platforms. By stimulating the documentation of oral literature and building a network for cooperation, the World Oral Literature Project supports an expanding community of committed scholars and indigenous researchers.

In 1991, years before UNESCO's proclamation regarding protection of oral traditions across the globe, the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA) was established in London. This association, created by scholars interested in exploring the rich oral traditions of Africa and the African diaspora from as many disciplinary perspectives as possible, continues to draw international membership from experienced professionals and students alike—all engaged in the widest spectrum of research with respect to African oral tradition, be it performance, literary, linguistic, comparative, theoretical, or metatheoretical studies. Currently, ISOLA identifies itself with UNESCO's initiative to preserve the world's "intangible heritage" and intends to establish a stable cooperative

relationship with the organization. This is evident in major publications emerging from the association's biennial conferences: *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature* (1995) edited by Graham Furniss, *African Oral Literature: Functions in Contemporary Contexts* (2001), edited by Russell H. Kaschula from papers presented at the 1998 conference in South Africa, *Oralite africaine et creation* (2005), edited by Jean Derive and Anne-Marie Dauphin-Tinturier, the special editions of the journal, *Research in African Literatures* (2007, 2009), on the theme of the 2004 conference in Gambia, "The Preservation and Survival of African Oral Literature" and on the theme of the 2006 conference in Trinidad and Tobago "Oral Literature and Identity Formation in Africa and the Diaspora," both guest-edited by Isidore Okpewho, the special edition of *Journal des Africanistes* (2010) on the theme of the 2008 conference in Italy "Cross Borders: Orality, Interculturality, Memory Archives, and Technology," the special edition of the journal, *The Global South* (2011), on the theme of the 2010 conference in Kenya, "Indigenous Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights in the Age of Globalization," guest-edited by Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, and special edition of the journal *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (2014) on the theme of the 2012 conference in South Africa "Orality and Technauriture of African Literatures," guest-edited by Daniela Merolla.

Despite the encouraging steps being taken to preserve African oral tradition, several of the verbal genres are still critically endangered, as globalization and rapid socioeconomic changes exert complex pressures on small ethnic communities on the continent. These pressures often erode expressive diversity and transform culture through assimilation. As vehicles for the transmission of unique cultural knowledge, indigenous local languages encode oral tradition materials that become threatened when elders die, livelihoods are disrupted, and diversity gives way to more homogenous lifestyles.

As a child, I participated in the creation and performance of riddles and other related genres, but it was during my fieldwork in the last 20 years that I noticed the precarious condition of the riddling tradition. Carrying out this research among Yorùbá speakers in Nigeria, Republic of Benin, and Togo has been an intellectual homecoming. As a native speaker of the Yorùbá language with an academic training in literature and cultural studies, I have been in an ideal position to provide new insights into this dying culture.

I conceived this book as part of an urgent need to document and make accessible endangered global verbal arts before they disappear without record. Riddling, the verbal art tradition on which this book is based, is a universal art. From Egyptian and Greek mythical periods to

contemporary times, riddles have been used to entertain, sharpen the wits of children, and test the intellect of both old and young. In short, the riddle has survived from generation to generation, effectively transmitting folk wisdom in capsule form. Furthermore, in the Yorùbá experience, riddles serve as tools with which its users explore language and linguistic curiosities as well as all-important pointers to the Yorùbá worldview. One may then ask the following pertinent questions: What specific social functions does the riddle play in Yorùbá society? Are riddles just amusing pastimes or do they contain vital markers and messages, essential for the continuance of a culture? In what ways do riddles reflect Yorùbá perspective on the human condition, human nature, the environment, celestial bodies, animals, and so on? These are some of the questions this book addresses, questions that require untying knots in the riddles themselves and in other related enigmas. It is my intent to discuss the richness and complexity of an Africa community by focusing on issues relating to its cultural and literary diversity, and to make effective use of authentic primary materials.

The book is divided into six chapters. For the reader's convenience, when read in sequence, the book provides a comprehensive, holistic sense of Yorùbá creativity where riddles are concerned. At the same time, the book is conceived in a way that each chapter could be read individually. Therefore, those readers seeking understanding of a specific type of riddle may target a single chapter appearing most relevant to her/his curiosity. However, there are two chapters that should be read together: chapter one (Yorùbá Riddles in Performance: Content and Context) and chapter six (Orature and Indigenous Education). The former presents the central thesis of the book, which is the culture of riddling, and also reviews the place of riddles in Yorùbá oral literary tradition. Chapter six returns to this central thesis and ties together the major role of orature in indigenous education. I challenge all readers to take a fresh look at issues that, formerly and frequently, have been either ignored or oversimplified in the study of riddling in Yorùbá culture.

The first chapter opens with a discussion on the place of riddles in the Yorùbá verbal art tradition. The chapter also includes the scholarly impetus for, and literary justification of, my decision to address this topic. To conclude, the chapter explains my choice of semiotics as the theoretical approach for identifying aesthetic and cultural values engrained in Yorùbá riddles. In the second chapter, I describe previous scholarly work on the structural aspect of Yorùbá regular riddles and posit that this scholarship provides only a partial view of the genre rather than the full treatment it deserves. Therefore, the chapter broadens the scope of this

topic by exploring the aesthetic dimension of social communication in Yorùbá regular riddles (popularly referred to as *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*). Sharing the same methodological or hermeneutic strategy—that is, metaphor—with previous riddle scholars, I acknowledge their work and also acknowledge that my discussion benefits from their insights. However, as stated previously, my intention is to move beyond their somewhat narrow focus on structure and form in order to explore the riddle as an authentic mirror, and uniquely aesthetic expression, of Yorùbá worldview.

The third chapter examines the blending of riddles and folktales. In this chapter I argue that sorting out the elementary forms of the riddle is difficult enough; however, the versatility of the riddle and related enigmatic forms (i.e., its capacity to blend with other genres) such as dilemma tales, riddle ballad, neck riddles, and so on, makes the problem even more complex. Often the objective of these tales is to examine secular social conflict. In this class of tales, the storyteller poses a problem or set of problems at the beginning of the narration. Concerted efforts are then made by the audience to resolve the dilemma or puzzle by ciphering the storyteller's narration, which is presented in a logical manner. Such a form lacks the pith and brevity usually associated with regular riddles, although both share the element of intellectual play involved in working out an answer. Field research identifies two types of tale-riddles in Yorùbá: those based on the Ifá corpus and the non-Ifá-based ones. While the Ifá-based tales are used to affirm or support the status quo, the non-Ifá-based tales are created to criticize or query the status quo. These stories may be rendered either entirely in poetry or in prose, or in a poetic-prosaic combination form.

The fourth chapter addresses song-riddles. Unlike other Yorùbá enigmatic forms inviting participants to display their imaginative power by identifying an unnamed object described in coded language or by decoding cryptic statements, song-riddles are meant for amusement, the playing of games, and the intellectual and social development of the child. Consequently, multiplicity of meaning, which governs other forms of Yorùbá riddles, is less visible in song-riddles. Nevertheless, the chapter notes that one still finds in many song-riddle texts the preponderant use of enigmatic dialogic routines consisting of question-answer or problem-solution pairs. The question-answer sequence of song-riddles is on the whole fixed. In many cases each text is memorized and generally known to members of the community where it is performed, so that everybody sings along.

The manner in which riddles exude vitality in modern-day society is the primary concern of the fifth chapter. It is my claim here

that riddles and related enigma genres have expanded from their original domain of orality to other territories—including modern literature, the media, popular culture, and the Internet. In the case of regular riddles, for instance, while new ones are being created on a daily basis, obsolete images in old riddles are being updated—either to demonstrate their contemporary application or to modernize and better align these images with contemporary usage. The chapter also examines the impact of these popular folk traditions on the writings of contemporary authors. While some writers borrow verbatim from (and therefore literally preserve) different types of enigmatic forms, others freely adjust the transferred folkloric materials to raise social consciousness in the minds of their readers—thereby freeing the oral material from the impediments of a fixed cultural perspective. These creative strategies comprise an important segment of this chapter, given their relationship to new riddles in contemporary contexts, modern-day urban tale-riddles, and the transformation of enigmatic modes in modern literature, the media, popular culture, and the Internet.

The concluding chapter enumerates this book's contributions to the field of literature. To begin with, I emphasize the primary role of orature in Yorùbá society; that is, assuming a public voice in indigenous education. Indeed, oral literature performers necessarily adopt the voice of the traditional minstrel whose art has always been an expression of the people's social and historical experience. Given that aging oral artistes, performers, and storytellers are passing away, oral materials are now undergoing a dynamic new phase or transmutation. One must increasingly rely on the media, popular culture, the Internet and, most especially, on the talented corps of contemporary writers whose unique treatments of orature will strengthen the appeal of these oral genres for future generations. Finally, I submit that by attending to the kind of data presented in this book, the cultural and literary legacy of oral traditions may be salvaged and not forgotten.

It is my hope that this book, the first full-length study devoted exclusively to riddles in an African society, will produce sober theoretical debates on such topics as the collective or communal character of oral cultures, the relationship between tradition and individual talent, and the unique circumstances required for traditions to emerge. Moreover, I envision scholars using this book not only as a reference for comparative analysis but also as fuel for ongoing debates in Africanist discourse on gender, class, ethnicity, language, and cultural nationalism. In short, by revealing the inarguable dynamism behind riddles, I hope to further the goals of African Studies as a whole. Because of the breadth and range of

issues and topics covered in this book, I have no doubt whatsoever of its relevance and use to scholars across multiple disciplines, including literary studies, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, linguistics, curriculum development, early childhood education, and, perhaps surprisingly, science.

CHAPTER ONE

Yorùbá Riddles in Performance: Content and Context

Not surprisingly, different scholars define riddles in different ways. Some definitions are more complex than others, but all essentially recognize the riddle as a word game in which the elements of intellectual exercise and verbal skill are combined to varying degrees.[1] When defining riddles, scholars make two basic assumptions. First, that there is always an attempt to match the answer with the question or proposition in terms of content and meaning; in other words, there is always a tendency toward a semantic fit between the problem posed and solution offered. This may be true in a majority of cases but, as we shall see later in chapter four, it is certainly not always true with song-riddle texts. The second assumption is that there are always two parties in a riddling performance, with one party proposing and the other responding. Again, this is true of most riddles, but it does not take into account the tale-riddle texts discussed in chapter three—texts in which the lead narrator both proposes and answers tale-riddles that s/he has composed.

Keeping these peculiarities in mind, this study benefits from insight provided by Isidore Okpewho (1992) who defines the riddle as "a verbal puzzle in which a statement is posed in challenge and another is offered in response either to the hidden meaning or the form of the challenge" (239). Careful consideration of this definition offers at least three advantages. First, the challenge-response component emphasizes the performance feature of this genre of oral literature as well as its play element—and may be considered just as apropos for the performer who answers his or her own proposition as for the usual two-part situation. Second, the idea of hidden meaning recognizes a certain level of sobriety in the verbal play of

riddles and thus acknowledges their metaphorical quality. Equally important is the acknowledgment of ambiguity, an aspect that many scholars view as key to the intellectual content of most riddles. And third, the separation of form and meaning in Okpewho's definition takes into account traditions such as the song-riddle in which the structure or aesthetics of the text are of greater interest than the message itself.

Riddles are generally based on familiar subjects or topics. Essentially they arise from a keen observation of details in one's environment. This includes the household and harvest; the world of animals, birds, and insects; plants and crops; the heavens and celestial bodies; the local topography, such as mountains, forests, rivers, and the like. Moreover, riddles deal with concrete objects and, on occasion, with processes. Rarely does a riddle deal with abstractions. For example, there are many riddles about ears, but few about hearing. Some may address coconuts, but not the activities of picking, husking, or drying the coconut meat. In addition, the selection of riddle subjects is influenced by value systems; that is, objects of positive value are selected as subjects and those of negative value are excluded. Finally, the riddle subjects are determined by their inherent riddle potentialities. For example, the egg and coconut have great potential as riddle subjects because of their unusual physical structure. These four factors, applied singly or collectively, yet do not completely explain the selective process at work in riddling. Other variables are involved and must be considered, including metaphor, brevity of expression, and linguistic influence.

C. M. Doke (1947) distinguishes among three types of riddles: the simple riddle, the problem or dilemma tale-riddle, and the song-riddle. Although the significant findings of some scholars render Doke's work a bit elementary, we may still adopt his categorization as a useful step in discussing the variety of situations in which riddles are performed in Africa, most especially among the Yorùbá. The simple or regular riddle indicates that one person poses a question or challenge and another (from a group of participants) offers an answer or solution. The standard procedure in this type of riddle, referred to in Yorùbá as *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*, is for one person in the group to offer himself or herself as a challenger, or proponent, and for another individual from the audience to step forward as the respondent. One party says something like "I have a riddle to tell" (*Ààlọ́ o*). The other responds, *Ààlọ̀*—or "Yes, bring the riddle" or "Yes, go ahead with the riddle." If the respondent is able to solve the riddle, the proponent must put forth another until one of the participants is completely baffled. If a particular participant is unable to provide the correct answer, the riddle proponent calls on a different participant. If no

one in the group is able to solve the riddle, the proponent demands from all other participants a formal "surrender" asking them to grunt three times (*Ẹ ṣe kùn-ún-ùn lẹ́ẹ̀mẹta*).[2] It is only after full compliance to this request that the proponent provides the riddle's solution.[3]

The song-riddle, a slightly different phenomenon, follows two patterns: the monochoral group performance and antiphonal group performance. During monochoral performances, all participants sing the song-riddle texts (like *Jáńpẹ-jáǹpẹ*) together from beginning to end. The important element in antiphony, on the other hand, is that one party provides a "call" and the other a "response" as in the example of *ìmọ́* song-riddle. This may take the form of "question and answer," or "problem and solution" pairs, but more frequently it is a device allowing performers to take turns in highlighting various aspects and dimensions of a single subject.

The question-answer sequence of song-riddle is on the whole fixed. In many cases each text of the song is memorized and generally known to members of the community where it is performed. As a result, everybody sings along during the performance. However, unlike the regular or simple riddles that invite participants to display imaginative power in identifying an unnamed object described in coded language, the primary objectives of song-riddle (discussed in chapter four) include playing games, general entertainment, and language training.

The problem or dilemma tale-riddle constitutes a class of narratives in which a storyteller creates a problem, and efforts are made either by the storyteller or any other member of the audience to resolve the riddle or puzzle through a narration logically presented. Dilemma tale-riddles are clever and popular, and exercise problem-solving skills. They are not only intellectual puzzles that sharpen one's wit and promote discussion, but they also point out that in human affairs there are often no answers, only difficult choices. This aspect of the human condition calls into play conflicting moral values. Dilemma tale-riddles constitute a large, diverse, and widespread class of folk narratives. They leave the listeners with a choice among alternatives, such as which of several characters has done the best, deserves a reward, or should win an argument or a case in court. The choices are difficult ones and usually involve discrimination on ethical, moral, or legal grounds.

Most often, it is the riddle proponent who resolves the dilemma after other participants have argued their conflicting points of view—but not always. Even those dilemma tale-riddles with standard answers can evoke spirited discussions. Like many other types of folk narratives, their content is often didactic. However, their special advantage is that they inherently train participants in the skills of argumentation and debate and

thus prepare individuals for participating effectively in the adjudication of disputes, whether within the traditional family, or lineage, or in formal courts of law. It is the dilemma tale-riddles' intellectual function and relevance to ethical standards, rather than any literary merit, that lend them interest. No elaborate plot or surprising denouement is necessary to present a dilemma tale-riddle, and some examples barely qualify as folktales. This accounts for why William Bascom (1975) could not differentiate between the Yorùbá dilemma tale-riddles and folktales, and claimed, "There was no opportunity to observe the telling of dilemma tales…among the Yorùbá of Nigeria" (3).

The Place of Riddles in Yorùbá Society

Among the Yorùbá, riddles are posed most often in the evening after a long day's work. It is at this special time that children and grownups gather in the family courtyard to listen to moonlight stories. There are taboos against the posing of riddles by day in most Yorùbá communities. Exceptions to this rule include classroom instruction and recordings for electronic media broadcast. Children are told that they will lose their mothers if they break the taboo and this idea is supported by the dictum *afọ́jú níí pàlọ́ ọ̀sán* (it is only the blind person that poses riddles by day). These taboos, according to Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1984) "are no doubt meant to discourage children from running away from domestic chores or work on the farm" (181).

Riddles play an important role in verbal arts (known as *erémọdé*) taught to Yorùbá children (Ògúndìjọ, 2005). Unlike other African regions where riddling contests simply constitute a type of entertainment, in Yorùbáland one finds that riddles are *always* performed (along with other tales geared specifically to children) during moonlight storytelling sessions. For instance, while regular or simple riddles serve as prelude to the storytelling sessions, texts of dilemma tale-riddle are narrated along with folktales during the session. Song-riddles are used very purposefully towards the end of the performance. These three forms of riddles are, proverbially, like Siamese triplets that can only survive in their connectedness and when performed together. To illustrate this concept, let's explore one example of a moonlight storytelling session recorded during fieldwork for this book.[4]

LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL: Yes, go ahead; tell it.

LEADER: Riddles, here they come.
ALL: Then let's have them!
LEADER: The Pàńkùrù that wears a metal-like cloth.
PARTICIPANT 1: I know it.
LEADER: What is it? Tell us.
PARTICIPANT 1: Tortoise.
LEADER: No, it is not tortoise.
PARTICIPANT 2: It is the rock.
LEADER: No, not the rock.
PARTICIPANT 3: Tell us the answer.
LEADER: Let all of you grunt thrice.
ALL: *Kùn-ún-ùn; kùn-ún-ùn; kùn-ún-ùn.*
LEADER: It is the palm kernel.[5]
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL: Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: A small house full of pegs.
PARTICIPANT 1: Mouth and teeth.[6]
LEADER: Yes, you are right.
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL: Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: Ancient ditch of my father,
Ancient ditch of my father,
If a small young boy enters it, it reaches his neck,
If an elderly man enters it, it reaches his neck as well.
PARTICIPANTS 1 AND 4: I know it (*same time*).
LEADER: You, tell us (*pointing at Participant 4*).
PARTICIPANT 4: It is the necklace.
LEADER: No, it is not the necklace. Now, you, tell us (*pointing at Participant 1*).
PARTICIPANT 1: It is the garment.[7]
LEADER: Yes, that is true.
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL: Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: The fat old woman; she trades in rags.
PARTICIPANT 5: The cobra.
LEADER: No, it is not cobra.
PARTICIPANT 2: It is bamboo.
LEADER: No, not bamboo.
PARTICIPANT 1: Please tell us.
LEADER: Let all of you grunt thrice.
ALL: *Kùn-ún-ùn; kùn-ún-ùn; kùn-ún-ùn.*

LEADER: I generously splash it on your face. The one who trades in rags is the banana plant.[8]
PARTICIPANT 4*:* That is true.
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL*:* Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: My father's old yam; it has a single leaf, and a single root.
PARTICIPANT 2*:* Teeth.
LEADER: No, it is not teeth.
PARTICIPANT 6*:* I know it; it is [the] mushroom.[9]
LEADER: You are right.
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL*:* Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: The slim, old woman; she carries her pregnancy by the neck.
PARTICIPANT 3*:* It is [a] pawpaw (papaya).[10]
LEADER: You are correct.
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL*:* Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: A very small pot that stuck itself in the forest.
PARTICIPANT 7*:* It is [the] snail.[11]
LEADER: You are correct.
LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL*:* Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER*:* The black head-tie draped across the road.
PARTICIPANT 2*:* Black ants.[12]
LEADER*:* Yes, you are right.
LEADER*:* Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL*:* Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER*:* One that stood on the grassy field as if to run;
One that walked along the boundary as if to fly,
And one that had a long bulky head.
The riddle is related to three-way dimensionals,
The answer is three-way dimensional as well,
The offspring of Láyílo.
ALL*:* (*5-second pause, and no one says anything.)*
LEADER*:* Alright then, let all of you grunt thrice.
ALL: *Kùn-ún-ùn; kùn-ún-ùn; kùn-ún-ùn.*
LEADER*:* It is the hare, the bush fowl (partridge), and the antelope.[13]
PARTICIPANT 1*:* Oh my God! We wouldn't have known it (the solution to the riddle) at all.

LEADER: Here is a riddle to solve.
ALL: Yes, go ahead; tell it.
LEADER: The sea is raging with waves,
The ocean is also raging with waves,
An old woman sat on top to spin thread.
PARTICIPANT 1: The spider.
LEADER: No!
PARTICIPANT 5: [A] wooden spoon (for stirring food).
LEADER: Not so.
PARTICIPANT 5: Tell us.
LEADER: It is the Ìròmi[14] insect.
PARTICIPANT 1: Can we have some Tortoise Stories?
LEADER: Alright, let's have it. Hear, hear, a folktale.
ALL: Let's hear it.
LEADER: My story is a fantastic tale.
ALL: About what?
LEADER: It is about the Tortoise.
PARTICIPANT 1: The sneaky one with the age-old shell, husband of Yánníbo.
LEADER: My story wandered and wandered, and crash-landed on Tortoise. Once upon a time, the wealthy ancestor of a community of people died, and Tortoise told his friends he was going to share in the late man's property.
PARTICIPANT 1: Tortoise, the smart guy. Is he related to the man?
LEADER: Good question. He is not (*addressing Participant 1*).

"You are neither related nor in business partnership with the dead ancestor," his friends declared. "You know that my other name, which you never knew before is Ẹ̀yìnọ̀la" (lit., after-tomorrow), replied the Tortoise. The Tortoise's reply meant nothing to his friends who still disputed the matter with him, doubting its possibility, but waited patiently to see how his wish would be realized.

The second day, the Tortoise prepared a vegetable stew, placed it inside his cap and set out for the house of the deceased man. When he was only a few yards away from the house, he burst into heavy wailing, chanting sorrowful dirges, and accusing the surviving children of the deceased with gross irresponsibility for failing to send for him. It had been seven days since their father died and they had not sent for the Tortoise. He repeatedly said, "You know that I am still alive and you did not send for me. You

slighted me because I am poor; probably you thought I had died. Does it mean that you never heard my name Ẹ̀yìnọ̀la that was often on the lips of our father? Here I am. I have come."

"Ẹ̀yìnọ̀la! So here is Ẹ̀yìnọ̀la that was long sought by our father. Wonderful!" said the eldest son of the deceased. "You are heartily welcome; father regretted that he never saw you before he died," said the deceased man's only daughter. The Tortoise too regretted that he never saw their father before he died: "That is what gives me terrible grief," he said, and began to wail again, chanting:

"I shall weep and shed tears profusely" (the audience joined in singing the refrain *Jinginnijín*)

"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I place a hand on my forehead and weep." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I place a hand on my forehead and weep." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*

Everyone at the house of the deceased man tried to console Tortoise for the death of "his" father, persuading him to stop wailing, reminding him that weeping cannot bring back the dead. Several speeches of consolation were made to pacify him, yet he continued wailing, shedding tears profusely and chanting:

"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I place a hand on my forehead and weep." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I place a hand on my forehead and weep." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*
"I shall weep and shed tears profusely." (All:) *Jinginnijín.*

The Tortoise continued to wail, occasionally lamenting, "So, you all can fail to remember me, it is bad to be poor; this is why my brothers have slighted me, and have refused to send for me when our father died. Oh! It is bad to be poor."

Participant 9*:* Tortoise the greedy-gut!
Leader*:* Yes, you are right; greedy indeed.

The other children started to plead again, saying: "We never intended it. We didn't know your whereabouts. Of course father

mentioned your name regularly saying: *Ta ló mẹ̀yìn ọ̀la*? *Kò sẹ́ni tó mẹ̀yìn ọ̀la*![15] (Who knows tomorrow? No one knows tomorrow!). We were confused at the sudden death of our father; all that we concerned ourselves with was how to give him a decent burial. Grant our pardon," they added. The Tortoise eventually stopped wailing, but occasionally heaved a sigh of sorrow. He then set out performing "his" father's final funeral ceremonies, serving sympathizers and relatives his prepared vegetables. He brought wine and beer to entertain, so that everybody drank to their full satisfaction.

When the funeral was over, the Tortoise gave notice of his departure. The other children called a meeting of all family members, with the Tortoise in attendance. One of them stood up, authoritatively addressing the Tortoise, "Now that father is no more, there is no other person older than you. You as the oldest son should tell us what to do with our father's assets."

The Tortoise replied, "I will take my own share of the property right now since I have to return home. Our older relations will help you share the remaining according to traditional rules and conventions." The Tortoise consequently took the youngest wife of the deceased, a horse, many costly clothes, and plenty of money, all of which had belonged to the dead man. He bade the other members of the family good-bye, leaving the place with his ill-gotten gain. He thus shared, with impunity, part of a legacy in which he had no claim. That is the end of my story. If I told lies, let the bell in my mouth not ring. If I did not tell lies, let it ring thrice: *Po, po, po.*

All: It rang. You are welcome.

Participant 10: (*walks in and sits quietly but other participants started to laugh*)

Participant 1: (*bursts out singing, and directing his song at Participant 10.*)

The truant is here again.

Refrain: We sent him away but he wouldn't go (*all but Participant 10*).

Participant 1: The truant is here again.

Refrain: We sent him away but he wouldn't go.

Participant 1: The truant is here again.

Refrain: We sent him away but he wouldn't go.

Participant 10: [The] one with a bleeding sore (*addressing Participant 1*).

REFRAIN: You soften pounded yam with bleeding from your sore (*all but Participant 1*).
PARTICIPANT 10: One with a bleeding sore.
REFRAIN: You soften pounded yam with bleeding from your sore.
LEADER: Stop it! We are not here to fight.
Alright! Let someone lead us in *ìmọ́* song-riddle.
PARTICIPANT 10: I will.
LEADER: Go ahead.
PARTICIPANT 10: Who would go to the night market?
ALL: I will go!
PARTICIPANT 10: Get me one penny worth of salt.
ALL: I do not wish to go again.
PARTICIPANT 10: Bring forth an *ìmọ́* riddle game, then.
ALL: I open an *ìmọ́* riddle game.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which *ìmọ́* riddle game?
ALL: The *ìmọ́* riddle game that is crowned.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which crown?
ALL: The crown named Ipò.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Ipò?
ALL: The one known as Ipò of ìṣẹ́ṛẹ́.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which ìṣẹ́ṛẹ́?
ALL: The ìṣẹ́ṛẹ́ of Ọmọ́yọ.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Ọmọ́yọ?
ALL: Ọmọ́yọ of Àkókó.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Àkókó?
ALL: Àkókó the deity.
PARTICPNAT 10: Which deity?
ALL: The earthly divinity.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which earthly divinity?
ALL: The Omnipotent one.
PARTICIPANT 10: What is called Omnipotent?
ALL: The Omnipotent one also known as Ekòló.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Ekòló?
ALL: The Ekòló also known as Adíbà.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Adíbà?
ALL: The Adíbà also known as Aṛẹṛẹ.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Aṛẹṛẹ?
ALL: The Aṛẹṛẹ at Mògún.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Mògún?
ALL: The Mògún of Onírè.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Onírè?

ALL: Onírè of Àfọ̀n.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Àfọ̀n?
ALL: The Àfọ̀n of Oníyèẹ́.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which Ìyẹ́?
ALL: The Ìyẹ́ on a hill.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which hill?
ALL: The hill located on the mother-earth
PARTICIPANT 10: Which mother-earth?
ALL: The mother-earth that produced cotton.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which cotton?
ALL: The cotton from which clothing is made.
PARTICIPANT 10: Which clothing?
ALL: The clothing that I am wearing.
PARTICIPANT 10: You are dressed like a tree.
ALL: I am dressed in cloth.
PARTICIPANT 10: You are dressed like a tree.
ALL: I am dressed in cloth.
PARTICIPANT 10: You are dressed like a tree.
PARTICIPANT 5: Let me lead *Bojúbojú* game-song.
LEADER: All right; go ahead.
(All *participants dispersed to take cover, leaving Participant 5 behind with his eyes covered and closed by another participant*.)
PARTICIPANT 5: My eyes are fully covered.
ALL: Yes.
PARTICIPANT 5: The monster is approaching.
ALL: Yes.
PARTICIPANT 5: Take cover and be vigilant.
ALL: Yes.
PARTICIPANT 5: Should I open (my covered eyes)?
ALL: No, do not open yet.
PARTICIPANT 5: My eyes are paining me.
ALL: May they pain you to death.
PARTICIPANT 5: Can I come and eat the melon-soup?
ALL: Yes, you can come.
PARTICIPANT 5: Should I open (my closed eyes)?
ALL: Yes, you can.
(*With his eyes now open, Participant 5 searched everywhere for the other participants but could not locate anyone. He was still busy searching when one of the participants started the closing song far away, and others joined in*.)
ALL: The one the *orò*[16] masquerade fell on

Surely does not make a good night-game playmate.
The one the *orò* masquerade fell on
Surely does not make a good night-game playmate.
The one the *orò* masquerade fell on
Surely does not make a good night-game playmate.
(*On hearing the song, Participant 5 concluded that the group had disbanded for the night, so he left the meeting venue, heading homeward as he joined others in singing.)*

This moonlight storytelling session can be analyzed in six parts as shown in table 1.1 demonstrating the intertwining of different types of riddles with other verbal art forms during the performance.

The analysis in table 1.1 demonstrates that the value of riddles in Yorùbá society cannot, and should not, be underestimated. As an art form, riddles perform integral social functions, and have inherent messages to convey to participants about societal norms.

Few would argue, however, that the most obvious function of riddles is amusement and entertainment. Indeed, every respondent derives pleasure in solving the puzzle set forth by the riddle proponent. This delight and satisfaction is felt most keenly by younger participants who, not surprisingly, are more frequently involved in riddling. In particular, the rather concise, almost coded idiom of the riddle allows participants to amuse themselves with some of those phrases and references to sexual organs and other aspects of the human anatomy (like elimination of the body's waste matter) that are generally taboo in daily speech. This type of riddle may be illustrated by the following three-in-one example, which says: *Àkọ́kọ́ dá igbó kú sí; èkejì tọ ọ̀nà tóóró rọ̀run; èkẹta lọ gbúù, a ò rí i mọ́* (The first finds a small bush [in which] to die; the second finds a narrow path [on which] to die; and the third one bursts into the air and disappears). The solutions to the riddle, respectively, are feces (*imí or ìgbẹ́*), urine (*ìtọ̀*), and farting (*isó*). Similarly, the solution to the riddle *igbó súúrú dẹjọ́* (the undergrowth bush that implicates its owner) is pubic hair around the genital organs (*irun abẹ́*). Invariably, children laugh heartily when riddles like these are told. Further examples of Yorùbá sexual and bodily function riddles are discussed in chapter 2; these riddles are most frequently told by teenagers. In this way, youngsters have an opportunity to release tension by speaking about topics morally forbidden in daily conversation.

"Every proper riddle," according to Dan Pagis (1996), "must fulfill two conditions: the first is its social function as a competition between the riddler and ridlees; the second is its literary form, which must be

Table 1.1 Intertwining of riddles with other verbal art forms during performance

Division of Performance into Sections	Type of Verbal Art Form	Comments
1	Regular or simple riddle	Ten such riddles are in this performance, although the number of regular or simple riddles in any given performance may be more or less—depending on available time and versatility of the session leader. Regular riddles are always used as a prelude to the moonlight storytelling sessions in Yorùbáland, as observed by Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1984), "Riddles often precede folktale narration" (181).
2	Story narration	This performance includes only one story: "How the Tortoise Shared in another Family's Inheritance," a story that falls under the subcategory of folk narratives. Rọ́pò Ṣekoní (1994) refers to this particular type of narration as a trickster tale. It is *customary* to include more than one story in this section of the performance, which could be selected from any of, or a combination of, the following: folktales, trickster tales, dilemma tales, myths, legends, explanatory tales, fables, and so on. Sometimes the boundary between one kind of story and another blurs. This is because stories are told for so many different reasons and before such a variety of audiences that their characters and interests necessarily vary. Let us take a closer look at the Tortoise story in the cited performance, classified previously as a trickster tale. A separate narrator could have chosen to challenge the audience at the beginning of the story by asking: "Who knows how the Tortoise shared in the inheritance of a nonrelation of his?" The same story, then, would become a dilemma or problem tale-riddle, and could no longer be classified as a trickster tale. This implies that every story presented during moonlight storytelling sessions should be classified on the basis of two criteria: either its major thrust or its obvious intent. This decision must be made not so much in response to the declared intent or wish of the narrator (who may have a biased interest in the matter) but rather based on one's own objective assessment of the story's facts.
3	Deterrence songs	We have two short examples of this category of songs in the cited performance: one directed at a truant participant and the other directed at a participant with a bad sore. Deterrence songs are *occasional* rather than regular parts of moonlight storytelling sessions. When used during or after the display of unruly behavior by a participant, the songs serve as an effective means of censuring bad behavior in children. In other words, there are appropriate verses to mock and discipline any child that violates a code of etiquette, be it stealing, lying, or playing truant.

Continued

Table 1.1 Continued

Division of Performance into Sections	Type of Verbal Art Form	Comments
		During the singing of deterrence songs, the children do not just sing; rather, they also pinch, push, beat, laugh at, or even spit on the culprit! The result is an overwhelming sense of shame that not only compels the child involved to turn over a new leaf, but also serves as a deterrent to others. While one may argue the efficiency of this system (that seems more like bullying), the fact remains that participants believe in the system and, of course, a child "caught" by the song could protest by introducing another deterrence song directed at his or her "attacker" (as shown in the cited text).
4	Song-riddle	The performance also includes an example of the *ìmọ̀* song-riddle. The intrinsic value of this category of songs lies (indirectly) in training participants in the art of effectively pronouncing sounds in the Yorùbá language. It should be noted that most song-riddles are recited competitively with hand clapping and body movements that match the song's rhythm. Adéfióyè Oyèṣakin (1981: 41) identifies two subcategories of song-riddles in Yorùbá: (i) the *ìmọ̀* and *àrọ̀* songs and (ii) the counting songs. As shown in the example of the *ìmọ̀* song-riddle, each of the songs in the first category are question-and-answer tags that form a type of suspended chain—the lines hanging on one another like knots in a chain. Should a line be removed from the song, a vital link is cut off and the entire song becomes a jumble. The essential function of this subcategory of song-riddle is to train participants to strengthen their memory function and to develop advanced levels of mental activity and verbal expression. The second type of song-riddle, the counting songs, although not included in the sample performance, assists participants in understanding the Yorùbá numerical system. It is fascinating to watch children as they count their fingers, coins, or even pebbles; they also clap and dance to the rhythm of the songs. Specific examples of this subcategory of song-riddle are discussed fully in chapter 4.
5	Game-song	The *Bojúbojú* game-song in Part 5 of the text represents a large corpus of children's literary art forms usually performed during moonlight storytelling sessions. Other popular titles include *Ẹkùn Méran* (The leopard captures the animal), *Ẹ bá mi Gbọ̀ndò yí gbẹ* (Help me scoop the lake dry), *Eyẹ Méta Tòlongo Wáyé* (Three birds migrated to the world), and so on.

This is a group of songs that children perform and associate with specific games. The term "game-song" is apropos, given that the accompanying games have elements of competition and rules specifying permissible human interactions and also identifying methods of how loser(s) or winner(s) are determined.

In *Bojúbojú*, for example, a safe spot (*ojú-ayé*) is selected and the song leader who mimics the "monster" stands at the safe spot with his or her eyes completely covered and/or closed. For obvious reasons, one of the participants shuts the monster eyes with his or her palms. As soon as the eyes of the monster are shut, s/he begins to lead the song while the rest pick up the refrain, hiding in the process. The leader then sings the line, "Can I open my eyes?" Those who have properly hidden themselves reply, "You can open them," while those who have not yet found hiding places answer, "Do not open [them] yet."

The song leader in the monster role begins the song all over again. This ensures that by the time s/he sings the phrase "Can I open my eyes?" the second time all other participants will have hidden themselves appropriately. Once the monster opens his or her eyes (after getting permission to do so from the group), s/he tries to find and capture at least one of the participants as all come running out of their hiding places attempting to reach the safe spot. The leader has three chances to capture a participant and if s/he fails on the third try, other participants gather around and shout, "Shame on you!" Another person then takes over as leader of the next game-song. If s/he is able to capture a participant, then that "victim" automatically becomes the next leader to introduce another variety of game-song.

One rule of the game is that the person who seals the monster's eyes must not disclose the spot where other participants are hiding. It is also forbidden for the leader to enter the safe spot while pursuing other participants. Because of these types of collectively accepted rules, game-songs act as checks on participants to be upright, faithful, and trustworthy. Also, because the performance of the song requires a fairly large number of participants whose talents for perseverance and tolerance are taxed to the fullest, the song provides avenues for socialization and adaptation.

This genre of songs, then, has multiple functions. Several of the songs involve physical exercise. Others require a keen sense of observation and/or emphasize certain skills and dexterity, therefore contributing to the physical and intellectual growth of the participants (who are mostly children). Furthermore, through the songs, children develop planning and experimentation skills. For instance, a child who has participated several times in a *Bojúbojú* game-song would have acquired, through practice, the skill of escaping from imminent danger.

6	Closing song	At moonlight storytelling sessions it is customary for participants to sing this song to formally signal the end of the performance. However, on occasion, participants may leave suddenly and prematurely before the closing song. This is permissible under certain circumstances, such as the onset of inclement weather, or an unexpected altercation between participants during which an elderly person intervenes and dismisses them.

difficult and enigmatic, yet containing the clues needed to decipher it" (81). Apart from the pleasure they provide, riddles constitute a formidable moral and intellectual exercise for Yorùbá children, and are useful in strengthening a child's reasoning and decision-making abilities. For instance, texts of song-riddles are expected to be memorized and delivered line-by-line, an expectation that strongly challenges a child's intellectual prowess. It should be noted that not all scholars agree with this assessment. While some argue that riddles do indeed sharpen and stimulate the participant's intellect, other scholars such as John Messenger (1960), John Blacking (1961), and Lee Haring (1974) posit that the principal stimulation received in riddle contests is in the excitement that the participants get in parrying with one another. Since the answer is fixed by tradition, the point in riddling is in knowing the answer rather than in solving the problem. However, Lyndon Harries (1976) contends that "the problem is not knowing the answer, but in knowing the reasons for the answer" (325). Also, in what appears to be the strongest defense for the intellectual quality of riddles, and of their value in exercising the mind, Ian Hamnett (1967) points out that even when a respondent does not know the answer and the proponent provides it, the former makes an intellectual effort to "see the point" or the logic of the answer provided (385). Before reasonable solutions can be supplied to riddles, deep and quick thinking is needed. At the same time, participants try to provide answers as accurately as possible to posed riddles. One may, therefore, rightly assert that riddles are an effective means of testing and improving the listeners' ability to think with speed and accuracy. It follows that the repetition of this type of mental exercise helps participants make quick, thoughtful decisions in real life situations, as well. Take the following riddle, for example:

Ọmọ baba àlọ́ kan láéláé,
Ọmọ baba àlọ́ kan làèlàè;
Bó ti ń jẹun, bẹ́ẹ̀ ló ń su ú, [Answer: *Asẹ́ / Ajọ̀*]
(The offspring of an aged riddle proponent,
The offspring of an aged riddle proponent;
As he/she eats, so he/she excretes it. [Answer: The sieve])

In this riddle, what might particularly agitate the listener's mind is determining the kind of creature that would excrete food the instant it is consumed. Moreover, each participant is expected to consider multiple solutions and to remember the framing of the riddle—just in case s/he

is called upon to lead the next session. This process stimulates children's memories and improves their reasoning abilities.

A further function of riddles is to introduce Yorùbá children to culture and tradition. As we shall see in the next four chapters, riddles may refer to Yorùbá myths and legends or call attention to historical events and geography. Still others refer to important cultural aspects such as religion and politics. For instance, the riddle: *Kòtò kan ń bẹ lójúde Ògúnmọ́lá; bá ò tẹ ọrùn kọ, kọ, kọ, a kò lè wò ó* (There is a pit in the frontage of Ògúnmọ́lá's house; if we did not bend the neck properly, we would not see it). This riddle, which has "armpit" (*abíyá*) as its solution, is based on the role that Baṣọ̀run Ògúnmọ́lá, the great Ìbàdàn war-leader, played during the nineteenth-century Yorùbá intratribal wars. According to Tóyìn Fálọlá and G. O. Ògúntómisìn (2001: 42–47), Baṣọ̀run Ògúnmọ́lá was a bold, fearless, and successful warrior, and the great services he rendered during the Ìjàyè war of (1860–1862) will forever be remembered by the Yorùbá generally and the people of Ìbàdàn in particular. What the above riddle suggests is that one has to be bold to approach Baṣọ̀run Ògúnmọ́lá, a disciplinarian and formidable leader who would not forgive anyone who offered him bribes (Johnson, 1921: 373–374).

Furthermore, some riddles contain elaborate and rich linguistic forms. As Ọlabiyi Yáì (1977) stated, such riddles have the advantage of being used as a tool to explore the syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics of Yorùbá language. Language-focused riddles may also contain archaic words and structures no longer in use—language that older, adult participants may have to explain to youngsters during the riddling session. A good example of this is the following string riddle:

Láfàkálẹ̀-Lágùnranran; Ọba Láyílo.
Aṣepo-má-lẹ́kù; Ọba Láyílo.
Aránwú-má-ní-ìkeke; Ọba Láyílo.
Ajagun-má-gbébọn; Ọba Láyílo.
Mẹ́rin là ń pa á.
Mẹ́rin là ń mọ̀ ọ́n.
Ọba Láyílo.
(The-long-creeping-one; ruler of Láyílo.
The-oil-producer-without-an-oil-pit; ruler of Láyílo.
The-thread-spinner-without-a-spindle; ruler of Láyílo.
The-one-who-fights-in-war-without-a-gun; ruler of Láyílo.
The riddle is related to four-way dimensionals.
The answer is four-way dimensional as well.
The ruler of Láyílo.)

Archaic words appear in this riddle describing certain objects that may be unfamiliar to younger riddle participants. The riddle has four answers: unharvested peanuts (*èpà*), the crab (*akàn*), the spider (*aláǹtakùn*), and the corncob (*àgbàdo*) still in its husk. While most participants may be familiar with the items listed as solutions, the comparison between the solutions and their metaphoric descriptions in the posed string riddle may not be clear to younger audience members. Therefore, an adult will have to help out by describing *ẹkù* (the palm oil pit), *aránwú* (a spinner), and *ìkeke* (a spindle) and by explaining the following: the peanut plant does not stand erect but rather creeps along on ridges at the farm; hence the descriptive name *láfàkálẹ́-lágùnranran*; the crab secretes a yellowish oil-like fluid to cover itself when in water; hence the descriptive name *aṣepo*; the spider lives in a web-type house built with thread-like material; hence the descriptive name *aránwú*; and the corncob still in its husk looks like a club used for fighting in the battlefield; hence the descriptive name *ajagun*.

A Review of Existing Works

One efficient way to initiate a literature review concerning Yorùbá riddles is to examine briefly some of the ways that some culture revivalists have dealt with the genre. Most of the existing publications on Yorùbá riddles consist of raw data collected during moonlight storytelling sessions. This data has been transcribed, classified, and paraphrased in English, but seldom analyzed. The first wave of riddle collection began in the late nineteenth century when several sociocultural organizations were formed by Yorùbá intelligentsia to promote documentation of their oral tradition. Some of these groups included Ẹgbẹ́-Olùfẹ́-ilẹ̀-ìbí wọn (Association of lovers of their fatherland), formed in 1883 in Abẹ́òkúta; Ẹgbẹ́-Onífẹ́ẹ́-Ilẹ̀-Yorùbá (Association of lovers of Yorùbáland), formed in 1907 in Lagos; and Ẹgbẹ́-Àgbà-ò-tán (Association of [Yorùbá] elders), formed in 1909 in Ìbàdàn (Ọlábímtán, 1974a). The emergence of these associations (all concerned with the development of Yorùbá language and culture) could be viewed as a direct response to the 1882 Education Ordinance introduced by the British colonial government. This ordinance, which discouraged use of the mother tongue for instructional purposes in Nigerian schools, was criticized by C. O. Táíwò (1971) for imitating "too closely the English Elementary Education Act of 1870 which was designed to satisfy the needs of England and was therefore unsuitable for a wholesale importation" to Nigeria (125).

In pursuit of their objectives, Yorùbá sociocultural societies organized lectures and workshops for their members, coaching them in oral tradition data collection. They also assisted in the publication of several book manuscripts.[17] It was not until the issuance of the 1926 Education Ordinance that the legal status of the Yorùbá language in the formal school system was finally settled. This ordinance has been described by Adédèjì Awóníyì (1973) as "the best colonial compromise which could meet the feelings and aspirations of the people in a multilingual country" (226). It clearly defined the role and status of the mother tongue in the formal school system, stipulating that the free development of children's minds should not be hampered by making the assimilation of ideas unnecessarily difficult by presenting them in a language other than the mother tongue.

The effect of the 1926 ordinance, which lasted till 1948, gave birth to a new spate of Yorùbá books created specifically for instructional use in the elementary schools. Among these books are three collections of *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* published in quick succession: D. B. Vincent's (1885) *Ìwé Àlọ́* with 200 regular riddles, E. A. Túgbiyìlé's (1948) *Àwọn Àlọ́ Àpamọ̀ Yorùbá (Yorùbá Conundrums)* with 434 regular riddles, and J. O. Oyèlẹ́sẹ̀'s (1948) *Àlọ́ Àpamọ̀: Apá Kíní* with 220 regular riddles. The preface to Túgbiyìlé's (1948) collection states clearly the objectives of these culture revivalists:

> The book is meant to preserve that legacy of the invaluable casket of wisdom bestowed on us by our grandparents. Besides, it will also serve as a drill-book which will be found useful as well as interesting, to some extent, as a substitute for the customary fire-side and moonlight education which our fathers used to impart in their children a few decades ago. It is realized that the present system of education leaves no time for such peasant moonlight family mind-training exercise. Instead, boys and girls spend a greater part of their evenings in preparing their school assignments, while their parents go to political meetings, lectures, cinemas, or remain at home to take stock of the business income of the day. The desire to produce the present work has remained latent in the author for several years. But the fear that all these would ultimately fall into oblivion impelled me to consider it obligatory for me, while I have the thought, to preserve for prosperity, this epitome of Yorùbá philosophy. (3)

After a hiatus of about 20 years, additional riddle collections were published, including Adélẹ́yẹ Adésuà's (1978) *Àlọ́* with 309 regular riddles, Bádé Àjàyí's (1998) *Òjìlélégbèta Àlọ́ Àpamọ̀ Yorùbá* with 640 regular

riddles, S. M. Rájí's (2002) *Àrọ̀ Jíjá* with 57 dilemma tale-riddles, and Báyọ̀ Ògúndìjọ's (2005) *Erémọdé* with 162 regular riddles.

However, very few critical works on the topic of Yorùbá riddles have been published despite the riddles' social relevance, educational value, and great diversity of content and form. William Bascom (1949), Afọ̀lábí Ọ̀lábímtán (1976), Ọ̀labiyi Yáì (1977), and Ọ̀látúndé Ọ̀látúnjí (1984) presented some structural and sociological analyses of *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* in their works, while Awóníyì (1975 and 1978), James Májàsán (1967), and Bádé Àjàyí (1990) briefly mentioned the educational value of regular riddles for Yorùbá children. Also, Adébóyè Babalọ̀lá (1970), Ọ̀ládélé Awóbùlúyì (1978), and Bádé Àjùwọ̀n (1986) examined the form and structure of song-riddle and tale-riddle in Yorùbá.

Why the paucity of critical works? According to Yáì (1977), "The implication of the Manichean separation of literature (i.e., élite literature) from folklore (i.e., literature by and for the masses) is that while literature is worth analyzing (and more so because the analyst is almost exclusively of the élite), folklore is supposed not to have anything worth analyzing" (455). In addition, the common fate of the so-called minor genres of Yorùbá literature, to which riddles belong, has been predictable; that is, the riddles have always been relegated to a position of "infra-literature." True enough, literary scholars have generally neglected minor genres, no matter which culture is referenced. Yorùbá scholars seem to be endorsing this tradition of neglect, based on unjustified preconceptions and without exercising requisite intellectual discernment. Yáì's proposition that genres such as riddles, proverbs, myths, so on, should be taken more seriously by literary scholars is not only plausible but sensible; hence this exploration and comprehensive study of Yorùbá riddles. These alleged "minor" genres are not intrinsically "minor." That is, they are not being judged based on their absence of literary virtue, but rather on the basis of their epigrammatic nature—particularly when contrasted with the so-called major genres, lengthier by definition. This is a strange literary judgment indeed, which establishes length as a cardinal literary criterion and dismisses genres that ought to be given serious scholarly consideration.

One major aspect of Yorùbá riddles that has attracted the attention of scholars is their form and structure. If we use the case of *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* as illustration, William Bascom (1949), who initiated the discussion, identifies a wide range of formal variation in the genre. He devises a system of symbols to represent the forms using *X* as the answer to be guessed, *Y* and *Z* as other subjects, and *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* as the predicates of sentences or clauses. In his attempt to make the system a generalized one, which could

be useful for the analysis of riddles as well as proverbs and other forms of folklore, Bascom evolves 29 formulae with some subtypes to represent only 55 examples of riddles collected from a single town (Ilé-Ifẹ̀) in Yorùbáland.

Since it is not certain that the 55 riddles examined by Bascom are representative of *all* Yorùbá riddles, one would expect new formulae for riddles whose formal structure is different from any of the structure of the recorded riddles. Consequently, Ọlábímtán (1976) rejected what Bascom proposed on the grounds that "there would…be no end to the number of formulae that could emerge from the system of symbols as devised by Bascom" (1). Instead, Ọlábímtán proposed the following alternative classification for Yorùbá *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*: (i) those that have identical or almost identical or very nearly the same opening gambits but different closing gambits and meanings; (ii) those that are different in wording but are identical in meaning; and (iii) those that are constant in wording but have various correct solutions (4).

Despite Yáì's (1977) admission that Ọlábímtán's work "provides one with a deep insight into the structure of *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*" (420), he nevertheless proposes an alternative classification based essentially on a different methodological point. While Ọlábímtán disregards the solution to the riddle in his analysis, Yáì sees "the answer to the riddles as part and parcel of *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*" (420). Indeed, he further argues that the "exclusive concentration on the question part of the genre, leaving the answer in the dark, is doomed to impose certain limitations on the deepness of the analysis." Yáì then classifies Yorùbá regular riddles into two main types: the metaphor *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* and non-metaphor *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*, separating the former into three subcategories of simple, compound, and paradox. He further identifies two subtypes of paradox riddles as simple and reciprocal, and two subtypes of compound riddles as juxtaposed and string—identical and nonidentical (450).

The most recent critical work on Yorùbá regular riddles is that of Ọlátúnjí (1984). In an apparent agreement with preceding scholars, Ọlátúnjí draws attention to the importance of figurative language in the genre. He argues that in riddles, "deliberate attempts are usually made to make the solution…difficult, hence the recondite nature of the metaphors" (183). Ọlátúnjí identifies the seven features of Yorùbá *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* riddles as follows: question-and-answer pattern, recondite metaphors, incongruity, sentence forms, sequential sentences, nominal concordial sentences, and sparing use of connectives (182–190).

What appears irrefutable is the shared observation of, and agreement by, previous scholars that figurative language features prominently in

Yorùbá riddles. For instance, Ọlábímtán aptly affirms: "[M]etaphor…is the main figure of speech employed in the Yorùbá (regular) riddles" (24). This assertion informs Yáì's classification and subcategorization of Yorùbá riddles into "Metaphor *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* (+Met) and Non-metaphor *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* (-Met)" (421). Yáì claims further that "(+Met) *àlọ́ àpamọ̀* constitute the bulk of the genre in Yorùbá" (422). Also, Àjùwọ̀n, in his study of the Yorùbá dilemma or problem poetic tale-riddle (*àrọ̀*), concludes that this class of riddles "shares in part the characteristics of the parable whose surface meaning intensifies the strength of its real meaning by the use of metaphorical language" (69).

However, while Àjùwọ̀n, Ọlábímtán, Ọlátúnjí, and Yáì focus on the form and structure of riddles, this research of mine proposes that a discussion of the content, function, and sociocultural relevance of the genre is capable of, and requisite to, providing a complete view of the aesthetic dimension of social communication therein. Rarely can one find any other Yorùbá verbal genre with such a condensation of poetic and semantic traits. Consequently, this study addresses the dynamics of the conception of social meaning; specifically, its remittance, and the sharing of that social meaning by riddle respondents who participate in the same rule-system of semiotization with the riddle proponents. Thus, the transmission and reception of social meanings is carried forward through the medium of riddling. To garner a comprehensive understanding of riddles in Yorùbá, one must examine their textual incidence, semantic and cultural content, and sociological context. Accordingly, this study will present a semiotic analysis of all three forms of riddles identified earlier: regular-riddle, problem or dilemma tale-riddle, and song-riddle. Moreover, this analysis will include, as much as possible, indigenous paradigms of aesthetics that have surfaced in the course of the fieldwork during which most of the riddles examined in this study were collected.

Theoretical Framework: Semiotics

Obviously, the most appropriate theoretical framework for this type of research is semiotics[18] or semiology, the science of sign systems: language codes, sets of signals, and the like. Terry Eagleton (1983) describes semiotics as the "systematic study of signs" (101), while Chris Baldick (1990) defines semiology as the study of "the production of meanings from sign systems linguistic or non-linguistic" (201). In short, both theories are concerned with an inquiry into human communication systems, particularly the systematic study of how signs, linguistic and nonlinguistic,

produce meaning. Since riddle language is largely coded, it lends itself easily to a semiotic analysis.

The discipline that endeavors to understand the human quest for meaning is known as semiotics. Relatively unknown in comparison to, say, philosophy or psychology, semiotics probes human nature in a unique way, without the usual unwieldy technical notions that other disciplines propose. It does so by unraveling the meanings of symbols, known more exactly as signs, which make up the system of daily life that we refer to as culture or society. The semiotician is, above all else, a people-watcher, a keen observer of how people communicate, how they gesticulate, how they typically behave in certain situations. The semiotician is interested in the details that reveal anything pertinent about the system of everyday human life, constantly asking: what does this mean? In semiotics, codes are systems of signs—words, gestures, movements, glances—that human beings routinely use to make and convey messages. The basic signs in a language code, for instance, are words, which can be combined in various ways to form spoken or written messages. Codes mediate the relationship between people in a society and are, therefore, effective shapers of how we think of ourselves and of others.

Semiotics refers to the strategies individuals employ when devising their messages as texts. A text is, literally, a weaving together of the elements taken from a specific code in order to communicate something. To semioticians, when someone says something to someone or writes about something, he or she is engaged in creating a verbal text. When an individual selects clothing items or dress for a specific occasion, he or she is making a bodily text, and when people employ specific gestures, body postures, and phallic props during courtship, they are utilizing sexual texts. The basic goal of semiotics is to identify what constitutes a sign and the meanings of that sign. A sign, according to Marsel Danesi (1999), can be identified by virtue of three dimensions:

> First, there is a *physical* dimension—the sounds that comprise a word, the movements that define a gesture, and so on. This is called interchangeably the signifier or the sign. Second, there is a *referential* or *representational* dimension; that is, the actual function of the sign, by which it directs attention to some entity (object, event, idea, being, etc.). This entity is called, equivalently, the *referent*, *object*, or *signified*. Finally, there is a *conceptual* dimension, by which the sign evokes in different people diverse thoughts, ideas, and feelings. This dimension is called, alternatively, *signification*, *interpretation*, or simply *meaning* (11).

Although semiotics primarily observes and documents how the world's many systems of daily life provide different *texts* for social living, its ultimate goal is to understand the human need for a *perfect text*. Aware that a direct path to the perfect text is unlikely to be found, semiotics is content to glean its insights into human meaning-quest by studying the distinct meanings generated through the world's various systems of everyday life. It is in this context that Umberto Eco (1976) defines semiotics as "the discipline studying everything that can be used in order to lie," because if "something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot, in fact, be used to tell at all" (28). This statement implies that signs do not tell the whole story or the whole truth about the text. Therefore, for the story in the text to be complete, the signs must be decoded and expounded within the context of the culture or society that produced the text in the first place.

By and large, semiotic method has been defined as a structuralist method, due to its focus on systems of meaning as reflexes of innate psychic structures. The premise that guides semiotic research, therefore, is that recurring patterns of meaning captured and expressed by means such as languages, narratives, and works of art are culture-specific reflexes of universal patterns in the human psyche. Cultures are seen as huge templates, each with its own particular configuration of openings through which these patterns take on specific forms. The forms produced by the different templates may be dissimilar, but the psychic substance, or content from which they issue forth, is the same. In the late 1960s the French semiotician Jacques Derrida rejected this premise, proposing a counterapproach now widely known as poststructuralism, by which he denounced the search for universal patterns of meaning behind the cultural templates. Derrida's theory has had particular impact on the field of literary criticism. Nevertheless, on the whole, semioticians continue to endorse structuralist principles and, by extension, the idea that there are basic meaning structures in the human species.

Three principles underlie semiotic analysis. The first is that all systems of everyday life have cultural roots, no matter how modern they may be. The first task of the semiotician is, therefore, to wrestle out the original cultural features from such systems. The second principle states that systems of everyday life tend to influence people's notions of what is natural in human behavior. The second task of the semiotician is, thus, to sift out the truly natural from the conventional. The third principle asserts that systems of everyday life influence worldviews. Thus, as I intend to demonstrate in this book, the Yorùbá riddles, which may initially appear to be trivial—nothing more than a "minor genre" to be classified under

children's literature—are indeed containers revealing implicit worldviews of the Yorùbá people. Semiotics ultimately allows us to filter the implicit meanings and images that swarm and flow through the genre. By understanding the images encrypted in the riddles, we become active interpreters of signs inscribed in each riddle text.

My hope is that this book will engender in the reader a curious, inquisitive frame of mind, so that s/he explores the information in much the same way a semiotician would closely examine details of a given society. Perhaps the greatest skill possessed by humankind is the potential ability to know oneself. Semiotics helps to sharpen that ability considerably. Admittedly, what I have chosen to write about (that is, the riddle) and my methods of interpretation strongly reflect the Yorùbá's particular preferences and worldviews. Whether one agrees or disagrees with my commentary and/or findings is irrelevant. The real purpose of this book is to stimulate the reader to think reflectively and critically about the systems of everyday life in an African society. That objective and that alone has made the writing of this book worthwhile.

CHAPTER TWO

Riddles and Metaphors: The Creation of Meaning

This chapter highlights the aesthetic dimension of social communication embedded in Yorùbá riddles popularly referred to as *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*.[1] Scholars such as William Bascom (1949), Afọ̀lábí Ọlábímtán (1976), Babalọ́lá Yáì (1977), and Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1984) have approached the structural aspect of Yorùbá riddles. Their somewhat narrow focus has provided a partial view of the genre although, from my perspective, not the full treatment it deserves. Since I share the same methodological or hermeneutic strategy (metaphor) with the aforementioned scholars, this discussion will benefit from and build on insight provided in their works. However, I intend to move beyond by emphasizing the Yorùbá worldview integrated in the riddles, rather than just examining their specific structure or genre form. My intention is to shed light on certain aspects currently being debated regarding the nature, or very existence, of Yorùbá philosophy.

Metaphor is a general property of Yorùbá poetry. Furthermore, its incidence and complexity are more evident in the riddles than in any other poetic genre. Riddles usually contain deliberate attempts to offer solutions to apparently complex enigmas; hence the recondite nature of the metaphors. For example:

(1) *Pósí tínrín gba egbèje òkú.* [Answer: *Ọ̀nà*]
(A narrow coffin that takes a thousand and four hundred corpses. [Answer: The road or path])

The riddle referent *ọ̀nà* (road/path) is the narrow coffin; people who walk on it are corpses. Apart from the vague comparison of people walking on a road to their dead bodies occupying coffins, there is no obvious connection between a road and a coffin. Similarly,

(2) *Èèsì abẹ́ ìrókò*
A-jó-ọmọ-jó-ìyá. [Answer: *Ebí*]
(The nettle under the *ìrókò* tree
Which stings child and mother. [Answer: Hunger])

The nettle serves as metaphor for *ebi* (hunger), which afflicts all people, regardless of age, gender, race, or religion.

An additional example may be observed in the metaphorical use of five elders accompanying the king of Ifẹ̀.

(3) *Àgbà márùún sin Olú Ifẹ̀ lọ sí ogun*;
Olú Ifẹ̀ rá,
Àwọn àgbà máràrún padà. [Answer: *Òkèlè àti ìka ọwọ́ máràrún*]
(Five elders accompany the king of Ifẹ̀ to battle;
The king of Ifẹ̀ disappears,
All five of the elders return. [Answer: The morsel of food and the five fingers])

The elders represent the five fingers with which Yorùbá eat their food. The king of Ifẹ̀ is the morsel of food that disappears into one's mouth during the "battle" of chewing and swallowing.

Next, take note of the stumpy old man image:

(4) *Àgbà ṣékété dé fìlà òrìṣà funfun lẹ́lẹ́*;
Ó wọ ṣòkòtò òrìṣà funfun lẹ́lẹ́. [Answer: *Olú*])
(The stumpy old man wears a very white cap like the god of whiteness;
He wears very white pants like the god of whiteness. [Answer: The mushroom])

The stumpy old man symbolizes a mushroom, short and white. The mushroom's top is the *fìlà* (cap) and its stem, the *ṣòkòtò* (pant). Its whiteness is also referred to in the riddle. And in

(5) *A gbẹ́ ilẹ̀, gbẹ́ ilẹ̀.*
A kan oníṣègùn rúgúdú kan tòun tàdó. [Answer: *Ẹ̀ta iṣu*]

(We dig the ground for a long time.
We come upon a roundish medicine man with a medicine gourd.
[Answer: The yam tuber])

In this riddle, the yam tuber signifies a ground-dwelling medicine man who possesses a gourd with healing herbs. The roundish form calls up the image of a gourd.

As demonstrated in the preceding examples, metaphor—which includes the poetic device of personification—is the main figure of speech employed in Yorùbá riddles. Human traits are attributed to mundane objects. The audience presupposes that riddles are *not* literal in their human references, for it is the aim of riddles to give a false scent. Riddle metaphors tend to attribute human characteristics to inanimate objects in order to focus attention on the similarities between the two. Ivor Armstrong Richards (1936) refers to this strategy as the "vehicle" and the "tenor" of metaphor, helping participants arrive at an acceptable solution for each posed riddle. The vehicle is the object whose attributes are borrowed while the tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed. To illustrate further,

(6) *Ẹyẹ tín-ń-tín fo igba igi.*
Kí ni o? [Answer: *Ojú*]
(A tiny bird that flies over two hundred trees in a jiffy.
What is it? [Answer: The eye])

The vehicle in the riddle question or statement is *ẹyẹ* (bird) and the tenor of the metaphor, which is the riddle's solution, is *ojú* (eye). The similarity between the vehicle and the tenor—that is, between "bird" and "eye"—is the ability of the bird to fly over many trees and the ability of the eye to see a number of trees simultaneously. Similarly, consider the following:

(7) *Awẹ́ obi kan,*
À-jẹ-dé-Ọ̀yọ́. [Answer: *Ahọ́n*]
(One segment of a kola nut,
Which is eaten 'till one reaches Ọ̀yọ́ (town) [Answer: The tongue])

The vehicle of the metaphor is *awẹ́ obì kan* (a segment of a kola nut) and the tenor is *ahọ́n* (tongue). The similarity lies in the physical appearance of vehicle and tenor. The verb *jẹ* (to eat) in the riddle indicates

the location of the tenor. The object exists in the mouth. It is comparable to a segment of a kola nut but, unlike the kola nut, is inexhaustible. The tenor in the following riddle is also the tongue, but expressed differently.

(8) *Obìnrin arẹwà ròǵbòdọ̀*
Tí ń gbé nínú ẹ̀gún. [Answer: *Ahọ́n*]
(The beautiful lady
Who lives in a thorn thicket. [Answer: The tongue])

The vehicle is *obìnrin arẹwà ròǵbòdọ̀* (a beautiful lady) and, as previously mentioned, the tenor is *ahọ́n* (tongue). They share two properties in common: appearance and location. The proposer of the riddle considers the tongue a beautiful and plump part of the body; hence the use of the words *arẹwà ròǵbòdọ̀* to describe the vehicle (a beautiful lady). But this good-looking and plump object resides in a place full of thorns. The place is the mouth and the thorns are the teeth.

As evidenced above, three primary strategies are utilized to compose metaphorical Yorùbá riddles: (i) referring to what an object does, (ii) referring to what is done to the object, and (iii) referring to the description of a specific part of the object. In every Yorùbá riddle a specific characteristic is selected, and the riddle is built around this characteristic. Frequently, a key strategy to understanding and solving the riddle is to analyze its metaphor. The following two riddles offer example:

(9) *Gbogbo ilé se ọ̀bẹ̀,*
Ọ̀bẹ̀ náà kò kún ìgbakọ. [Answer: *Isó*]
(Everyone in the household participated in preparing a stew,
But the stew did not fill a ladle. [Answer: Fart])

One characteristic of the stew (that could be referred to in this riddle) is that it emits odor. The odor may be nice or nasty. The question then becomes: what smells and is produced by every human being? The answers could be any of the following: *oúnjẹ* (food), *ìgbẹ́* (feces), *isó* (farting), or *ìfẹ̀* (belching). By elimination, the solution to the riddle cannot be food because stew is the vehicle of the metaphor. It cannot be feces either because feces could easily fill a ladle. The solution then could be either farting (*isó*) or the bad odor from belching (*ìfẹ̀*). The solution given to the riddle is farting (*isó*), and the reason may be because *isó* is emitted from the anus, and there is some association between *ìdí* (buttocks) and

ọbẹ̀ (stew) in such Yorùbá sayings as *ìkòkò tí yó jata, ìdí rẹ̀ á gbóná* (lit., the pot that wishes to have a palatable stew in it will first endure a scalded bottom—meaning, good things come only after great labor or suffering). In the second example,

(10) *Ẹ̀fọ́ Ọlọ́run,*
A-fẹ́-ǹ-fẹ́-tán. [Answer: *Irun orí*]
(God's own spinach,
That-which-is-inexhaustible. [Answer: The hair on a human head])

The vehicle is *ẹ̀fọ́* (spinach), and the special characteristic is that which is inexhaustible after being cut. To solve the riddle, one must think of something that is (i) primarily like spinach that sprouts or grows each time it is cut and (ii) planted similarly to spinach, but only by God rather than by man. Although we are not told what the growing medium is for the spinach-like substance, we know that it is not soil—since the word spinach is the vehicle of the metaphor employed in the riddle. Having eliminated earth (soil), we are tempted to consider the other three basic elements: water, air, and fire. However, an object growing on any of these could not be cut by human beings, as suggested in the riddle. Therefore, the most logical solution to the riddle is hair, since one could argue that human hair is "planted" by God and that hair grows each time it is cut.

Interestingly, multiple metaphors may be used in a riddle. In such cases the objects being metaphorically referred to are generally related. Such riddles normally require two answers or solutions. However, only one answer is generally ascribed to each riddle in the form of one lexical item. For example:

(11) *Bèbè òkun ya lu òkun;*
Òkun gbẹ̀. [Answer: *Èlùbọ́* or *gàárí*]
(The riverbank falls into the ocean;
The ocean is dried up. [Answer: Yam flour or cassava flour])

This metaphor involves two related images : *bèbè* and *òkun* (riverbank and ocean), and the same relationship stands between these two vehicles and the two tenors; that is, *èlùbọ́* or *gàárí* (yam flour or cassava flour) and *omi híhó* (boiling water). In fact, a mixture of the two produces a dense paste. Logically, there should be two answers for this riddle: *èlùbọ́* or *gàárí* (yam flour or cassava flour) and *omi híhó* (boiling water) but only one

(the former) is seen as the acceptable solution. Similarly, consider the following riddle:

(12) *Bín-ń-tín yin-ún*
A-dùn-má-ní-èèpo. [Answer: *Oyin*]
(The extraordinarily small thing
That is sweet even though it is without peel. [Answer: Honey])

The vehicle (*Bín-ń-tín yin-ún* = the extraordinarily small thing) is a lexical dummy although it has connotations for a Yorùbá ear. The presence of *èèpo* (peel) suggests that it may be a fruit, but the descriptive part of the riddle tells us that it is not a fruit (*má ní èèpo* = without peel). In this case, the phonic similarity between the vehicle (*yin-ún*) and tenor (*oyin*) creates and reinforces the metaphor.

The examples provided above confirm Elli Köngäs-Maranda's (1971) suggestion that "a riddle is the intersection of two truisms" (198)—the interface of the vehicle and tenor in the metaphorical statement woven into the riddle and its solution. Let us examine the intersection of common features, or traits, in the riddle below.

(13) *Àkukọ babaà mi láéláé,*
Àkukọ babaà mi làèlàè,
Ó kọ láyé.
Wọ́n gbọ́ ọ lọ́run. [Answer: *Ìbọn*]
(My great-grandfather's rooster,
My ancestral father's rooster,
It crows here on earth.
The crowing is heard in heaven. [Answer: The gun])

The intersection of vehicle and tenor in the riddle's metaphor are the sounds produced by the rooster and gun, respectively. While a rooster's crowing is only audible within a limited distance, the sound produced by a gun travels significantly farther (see figure 2.1).

If the riddle is the intersection of two truisms, it is because some correspondence can be established between the vehicle and tenor of the riddle's metaphor. We can therefore analyze the metaphoric element of the riddle as the meeting point where common features or characteristics of both the vehicle and tenor merge. One further example is the following:

(14) *Èṣúrú gúdúgbú Ọládìmókùn,*
Èṣúrú gùdùgbẹ̀ Ọládìmókùn,

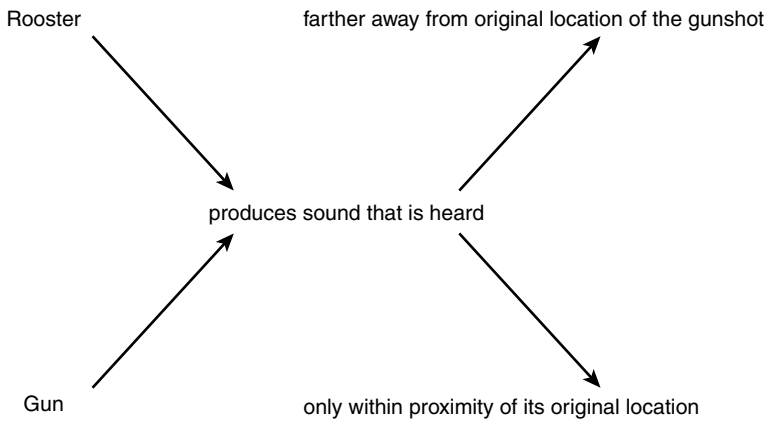
Rooster
farther away from original location of the gunshot
produces sound that is heard
Gun
only within proximity of its original location

Figure 2.1 The intersection of "vehicle" and "tenor" in metaphor.

A bù ú jẹ pọ̀nmọ́,
A wòkè pàrò,
A ṣẹnu múlá. [Answer: *Ẹyin sísè*]
(The small yellow yam of Ọládìmókùn,
The big yellow yam of Ọládìmókùn,
It is bitten with little difficulty,
Without any discomfort,
And one eats it with relish. [Answer: Cooked egg])

According to Yáì (1977: 449), characteristic features belonging to the vehicle (*Èsúrú* = Yellow yam) and the tenor (*Ẹyin sísè* = Cooked egg) seem to be threefold: their yellowish color, rounded shape, and edibility, represented as follows (see figure 2.2).

Although the metaphor occurs at the intersection of the common traits of vehicle and tenor, the Yorùbá regular riddle, *àlọ́ àpamọ̀*, "is formulated in such a way as to conflate the intersection to the status of union" (Yáì 1977: 449). Both vehicle and tenor are described in riddles as if all their features are common. Rarely can one find a genre with such a condensation of poetic and semantic traits in Yorùbá. Genres *within* Yorùbá literature rarely offer such a dense integration of poetic and semantic features.

Furthermore, the customary Yorùbá riddle serves as a tool with which its users explore language. It also functions as a pointer to the Yorùbá social and cultural worldview. One may then ask: what social functions do riddles

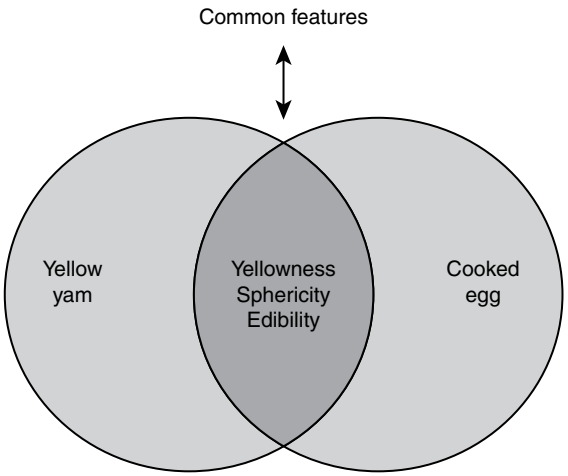

Figure 2.2 The intersection of common features of "vehicle" and "tenor" in metaphor.

fill in Yorùbá society? Are riddles merely pastimes or do they have inherent messages to convey? How do riddles correspond to Yorùbá thought regarding human existence, the environment, science, mathematics and logic, celestial bodies, animals, birds, insects, and so on? These questions deserve attention and are addressed in the remaining sections of this chapter.

The Yorùbá use riddles to fill leisure hours and as a form of amusement, certainly, but also as a strategy to educate and test imaginative power. Yorùbá riddles combine recreational and educational features to an unusual degree, and are therefore hugely significant from a social perspective. In addition to social relevance, the extraordinary diversity of content and form makes the riddle genre a most interesting and inspiring subject of study. As mentioned, the primary purpose of the riddle is entertainment, especially for children. However, ridddles also constitute a formidable moral and intellectual execise and are used as a medium for developing the child's reasoning faculty as well as for sharpening his/her decision-making skills. Yorùbá riddles, like riddles found in other parts of Africa, serve a meaningful intellectual role. Riddles not only facilitate mental development but also train children to be useful and to contribute to their communities. Virtually all Yorùbá parents want their children to be intelligent, upright, kind, honest, and helpful to others; therefore, they will spare no effort to instill these qualities either directly or indirectly. This is a primary function of the various forms of oral literature such as riddles, folktales, proverbs, songs, and so on.

Riddles on Agriculture: Farm Products, Farming Tools, and Implements

Riddles stem from observation and perception of one's environment; that is, the totality of one's physical, biological, and sociocultural surroundings within a given place. Since each African community occupies a specific geographical area on the continent, riddles differ widely in content. Specific objects within each community's environment, for example, inspire artistic expression.

The majority of precolonial Yorùbá people engaged in agriculture. When cultivating fields, planting crops, and bringing in the harvest, each man relied on his dependent male family members for assistance. Given this widespread involvement in cultivating the land, agricultural Yorùbá communities constantly developed riddles referring to crops (such as fruits and vegetables) agricultural tools, and other helpful accoutrements. Let us consider the following riddles about four different agricultural products: banana or plantain, yam, black-eyed peas/beans, and palm nuts:

(15) *Ọmọge gbòngbòngbòng

Òrúkú who has two hundred children,
And applies lead sulfide (as eye lashes) to them all. [Answer: The black-eyed pea])

(18) *Ó kọ́lé sínúu sáláńgá,*
Ó yọ ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ sínúu ẹ̀gún,
Ó dénúu yanrìn, ó fara pa. [Answer: *Odi ẹyìn*]
(S/he built a house inside the pit,
Had the corridor of the house inside a thorn thicket,
But was injured only when on a sandy place. [Answer: A bunch of palm nuts])

The banana or plantain plant in riddle 15 is described as "a tall and plump lady who gives birth through the head" because this plant bears fruit only at the top of its trunk. In riddle 16, a roundish sprouting yam tuber (ready to harvest at the mound of earth where it was originally planted) is described as an egg laid by a bird. Riddle 17 refers to the small dark spot on the black-eyed pea (bean) that lines the seed much as an eyebrow (or darkened eyelash) might. This is compared to lead sulfide (*tìróò*) that Yorùbá women used before the advent of commercial eye makeup. The last example in riddle 18 gives a detailed description of palm nuts before and after harvest: the fresh uncut fruit is usually located in a thorny environment among the palm fronds. However, when cut by the tapper, the bunch of nuts falls from a great height and its seeds scatter widely when hitting the ground.

Several other agricultural products are found in riddles, including the watermelon (*bàrà*), described in riddle 19 as a roundish, hard object which, when harvested and thrown by the farmer to the edge of the property, rolls on a solid form without breaking:

(19) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú bẹ́ sáàlà pìì,
Ó ní ẹ wáá wayé òun ò-tindi. [Answer: *Bàrà*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú that vigorously jumped at the property line
And invited people to feel its round and solid form. [Answer: The watermelon]).

The mushroom (*olú*), with its single umbrella-like leaf (cap) and lone stem, is described in the following riddle as:

(20) *Ewé kan,*
Egbò kan.
(One leaf,
One root.)

More elegantly, in poetic form, the musroom appears as:

(21) *Iṣu babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Iṣu babaà mi kan làèlàè;
Ewé kan níí ní,
Egbò kan níí ta.
(There was my father's old yam,
There was my father's old yam;
It has a single leaf,
And a single root.)

The pepper (*ata*), a spicy fruit that burns one's mouth and "heats" up cooked food, is presented in the following riddle as:

(22) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú ní igba ọmọ,
Gbogbo wọn ya àjẹ́.
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú that gave birth to two hundred children,
And all of them became witches.[2])

The cashew seed (*kaṣú*) that usually "sits" on a leathery fruit is also described in riddle form as:

(23) *Ìyàwó ẹlẹ́yinjú ẹgẹ́*
Orí àpótí ni a ti ń bá a.
(The beautiful-eyed wife
Is often found seated on a stool.)

Here is a riddle describing fresh okra (*ilá*):

(24) *Olóríburúkú dé ọjà*
A bẹ́ ẹ lórí.
(The unlucky one came to the market
And its head was cut off.)

This riddle makes perfect sense because, when okra is taken to the market for sale, the Yorùbá cut its nipple-like head with a sharp knife to differentiate the good from bad. While fresh, palatable okra will cut easily with a sharp knife; tough okra (to be avoided) will resist easy slicing.

It is important to note that popular and widely used food staples such as corn may inspire a multitude of riddles. Below are five riddles describing corn (*àgbàdo*) from various perspectives:

(25) *Ọmọge gbộ̀ngbộ̀nràn,*
Ẹ̀gbẹ́ ló ti ń bímọ. [Answer: *Pòpórò àgbàdo*]
(A tall and plump lady,
She always gives birth through the side. [Answer: The stem of the corn plant])

(26) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú ní igba aṣọ,
Ó rin ìhòrìhò wọ ọjà. [Answer: *Àgbàdo tí kò ní háhá*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú has two hundred dresses,
And walks naked to the marketplace. [Answer: Corncob without the husk])

(27) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú bímọ,
Ó yọ kùmọ̀ lé e lọ́wọ́. [Answer: *Àgbàdo tó ní háhá lára*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú has a child,
And gives him/her a club. [Answer: Corncob still in the husk])

(28) *Idà lewé;*
Ìgò lèso rẹ̀.
Ta ló mọ ọ́n o? [Answer: *Àgbàdo tó ní háhá lára*]
(Its leaves are like swords;
Its fruits are like bottles.
Who knows it—the solution? [Answer: Corncob still in the husk])

(29) *Àgbà ìmàle,*
Ó wé ọmọ rẹ̀ ni láwàní.
Ta ló mọ̀ ọ́n o? [Answer: *Àgbàdo tó ní háhá lára*]
(A devout Muslim
That turbans his son.
Who knows it—the solution? [Answer: Corncob still in the husk])

Riddle 25 describes corn as "a tall and plump lady who gives birth through the side" because the plant bears its fruit (the corncob) in ears that develop at the plant's midsection, between stem and leaf sheath. But riddles 26, 27, 28, and 29 describe the shape of the corncob differently, especially when in or out of the tightly enveloped leaf layers referred to as husks. In riddle 26, for instance, the corncob is portrayed as someone who "walks naked to the market place" because corncobs are usually taken to market in Yorùbáland without the husk. However, riddle 27 refers to the shape of a corncob when still attached to the stem of the plant; its club shape is similar to clubs used by Yorùbá foot soldiers during the eighteenth-century intratribal wars. Riddle 28 is more concerned with the plant's long sword-like leaves—and the corncob's narrow tip that makes it look like a bottle. Finally, riddle 29 compares a corncob still in its husks to the turban (cotton or silk headdress) worn by male Muslims.

In the same vein, the following five riddles express Yorùbá observations about the palm tree (*ọ̀pẹ*) and its fruit. The answer to each is palm tree.

(30) *Ògìì̀gi fíí*
A-ró-igba-aṣọ-má-balẹ̀.
(A swift shadow
That wears two hundred clothes without any reaching the ground.)

The palm tree has mutiple fronds usually found at the top of the tree. However plentiful these fronds, they never touch the ground while still attached to the tree. Sharp thorns are found along the two edges of dried palm fronds (*ìgbágó*), as described below:

(31) *Àgbàlagbà òòṣà*
A-bi-eyín-légbẹ̀ẹ́.
(An aged deity
With teeth by the cheek.)

Similarly, the bunch of palm nuts (*odi ẹyìn*) that falls from a great height when harvested by the tapper from the palm tree is presented as:

(32) *Ọbọ tàkìtì;*
Ẹyinjú rẹ̀ yọ fòò.
(The monkey somersaulted;
Its eyeballs flicked out fast.)

The above riddle refers to the scattering of palm seeds when they hit the ground. Although most trees shed their leaves during the dry season, the palm tree retains its palm fronds, as described in riddle 33:

(33) *Gbogbo igi ló wọ́wé,*
Ṣàpàti nìkan ni kò wọ́wé.
(All the trees shed their leaves,
It's only Ṣàpàti that does not shed its own.)

Finally, the palm tree is compared to a gatekeeper:

(34) *Oníbodè gán Jìganjìgan,*
Ó fi ìrùkẹ̀rẹ̀ na ara rẹ̀ fàì;
(The mighty gatekeeper,
Who beats her/himself with a switch.)

When the palm branches age, rather than remain erect on the tree, they slope down, hanging alongside the trunk. The hanging palm fronds are described as the gatekeeper because they prevent the taper from climbing to the top of the palm tree.

Yorùbá riddles also describe crops that have been processed and are ready for animal or human consumption. The most important part of "Yorùbá women's work on the farm," according to Nathaniel Akínrẹ̀mí Fádípẹ̀ (1970), "consists of changing the form of the various crops harvested so as to bring them a stage or two nearer the point of ultimate consumption" (148). One example of this is the shelling of black-eyed peas (beans—*ẹ̀wà* or *erèé*), as described in riddle 35:

(35) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú bimọ lẹ́gbẹ̀run.
Gbogbo wọn rin ìhòrìhò wọ ọjà.
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.

Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú has thousands of children.
They all walked naked to the market place.)

Shelling black-eyed peas is a fairly simple step to ready the beans for cooking. However, preparing other foodstuffs often requires longer processes. An example is the yam (*iṣu*). Although it can be simply boiled, preparation is often carried one step further by pounding it into a smooth, flexible and silky mass known as *iyán*—which happens to be the solution to the following three riddles:

(36) *Kùkùté oko babaà mi kan láéláé.*
Kùkùté oko babaà mi kan làèlàè.
Tọmọdé-tàgbà níí jókòó yí i ká lálaalẹ́.
(There is this tree stump on my father's farm.
There is this tree stump on my father's farm.
Both old and young sit around it every night.)

(37) *Òṣùpá abẹ́ ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀,*
A-ràn-má-dé-ilé-ọ̀lẹ.
(The moon that is visible from inside the house,
But not visible to the lazy one in his/her house).

(38) *Ọpẹ babaà mi kan láélaáé,*
Ọpẹ babaà mi kan làèlàè;
Orí ni a ti ń gbè é,
A kì í gbè é nídìí.
(My father's old palm tree,
My father's old palm tree;
It is from the top that we extract its wine,
Not from below.)

In riddle 36, the processed food *iyán*, when served in a dish and ready for comsumption, is compared to a tree stump around which old and young congregate nightly. In fact, Yorùbá family members sit on a mat around the plate of *iyán* at dinnertime. Riddle 37 compares the same food item to the moon because *iyán*, which is white and round when served, resembles the full moon. But the riddle presents a paradox. This moon is not available to lazy ones—by which is meant lazy individuals who do not go to the effort of planting yams on their farms. These

people cannot expect to enjoy *iyán* at their dinner tables. Finally, riddle 38 compares *iyán* to the palm tree that is pierced at the top but not below (for its palm wine) because Yorùbá use their fingers to tear off chunks of *iyán* top-down when eating.

The ubiquitous yam is described in riddle form in numerous ways: peeled in its raw state, sliced into oval slabs about half-an-inch thick, slowly heated (slabs) loaded into a claypot full of water, dried in the sun, and laboriously pounded and sifted into fine powder known as *èlùbọ́ iṣu*. The raw harvested yam is thus transmuted in form far beyond its original state. Flour from the cassava root (*èlùbọ́ọ láfún*) is subject to the same process as yams and, like the yam, its processed product bears no resemblance to the original raw root. Yet another form of cassava root (*gàárí*) prepared for consumption requires a process that is the most laborious and exhausting of all, a process that turn it into finely powdered form. Neither *èlùbọ́ iṣu* nor *láfún* is immediately edible in this powdered form; rather, each requires stirring into a stiff paste in boiling water. The quantities prepared vary, as needed. Hence, the essence of the following riddle:

(39) *Bèbè òkun ya lu òkun;*
òkun gbẹ. [Answer: *Èlùbọ́*]
(The riverbank falls into the ocean;
The ocean is dried up. [Answer: Yam flour])

The dark brown mass produced from the mixture of yam flour (the riverbank) and boiling water (the ocean) forms what is known as *àmàlà* or *ọkà*, one of three principal Yorùbá staple foods, and the solution to riddle 40:

(40) *Ìyá rẹ̀bẹ̀tẹ̀ jókòó kalẹ̀*
Gbogbo ènìyàn ló ń yín in léèékánná.
(The seated fat woman
That everybody is pinching with their fingernails).

The unusual visual in this riddle refers to a Yorùbá habit—using one's fingers to pinch off morsels of *àmàlà*, which are then dipped in a richly seasoned vegetable stew.

Three other processed foods treated prominently in riddles include *àkàrà*, *ẹ̀kọ*, and *ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*, as demonstrated in the following examples:

(41) *Ó ń lọ sóko, ó wẹ̀wù funfun.*
Ó ń bọ̀ oko, ó wẹ̀wù pupa. [Answer: *Àkàrà*]

(While going to the farm, s/he was wearing a white garment. While returning from the farm, s/he was wearing a brown garment. [Answer: Fried bean cake])

(42) *Ọmọge a-pọ́n-bépo-rẹ́,*
Bó ti rẹwà tó, ewé lásán laṣọ rẹ̀. [Answer: *Ọlẹ̀lẹ̀*]
(The beautiful light-skinned lady,
Though beautiful, she wears only leaves as clothing. [Answer: Cooked pudding made from black-eyed pea paste wrapped in leaves])

(43) *Tíṣà kúkúrú ọ̀nà Ìbàdàn,*
Bó ti dára tó, ewé ló fi ń bora. [Answer: *Ẹ̀kọ eléwé*]
(The short teacher who lives on the way to Ìbàdàn,
Though beautiful, she covers herself with leaves. [Answer: Cooked maize paste wrapped in leaves])

Riddle 41 addresses the resulting product when black-eyed peas are processed into fried cakes. To start preparing bean cakes, shelled black-eyed peas are soaked in water for about 30 minutes to facilitate easy peeling. The peeled beans are then soaked again for another hour or so, then ground into paste using a mortar/pestle or blender. The ground bean paste is stirred continously until a fluffy white paste forms. This paste is referred to in the riddle as the "white garment." To complete the process, salt, onion, and other necessary spices are added to the fluffy paste, which is then scooped up in small quantities, placed in hot palm or vegetable oil, and fried on low heat. During the frying process, the paste turns into a brown hard ball (*àkàrà*); hence, its solution to the riddle.

The process for the preparation of *ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀* (pudding made from ground bean paste), the solution to riddle 42, is similar to that of *àkàrà*. However, instead of frying the blended paste (which is mixed with a little oil and requisite spices), it is scooped into leaves, wrapped carefully, and placed in a cooking pot to be steamed on low heat. The final yellowish product is what the riddle refers to as "the beautiful light-skinned lady who wears leaves." On the other hand, *ẹ̀kọ*, the solution to riddle 43, described as "the short beautiful teacher who covers herself in leaves" refers to the soaking of maize grains in water for 3–4 days, blending the mixture and allowing it to ferment overnight. After fermentation is complete, the starch from the blended grain (known as *ògi*) is added to boiling water and cooked continously until a paste is formed. The paste is then scooped into leaves and wrapped to form a solid paste known as *ẹ̀kọ* that must be

unwrapped in order to be eaten cold. The purpose of processing food is twofold. First, like other communities, the Yorùbá traditionally prepare harvested crops for immediate consumption and second, they preserve harvested crops through various processing methods to protect their families' food from destruction by insects, rodents, or weather.

Two important farm tools regularly used by Yorùbá small-scale farmers are the machete or cutlass (*àdá*) and the hoe (*ọkọ́*). These are presented in riddles as follows:

(44) *Abẹ̀bẹ̀ẹ babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Abẹ̀bẹ̀ẹ babaà mi kan làèlàè
A-beyín-lẹ́gbẹ̀ẹ́. [Answer: *Àdá*]
(My father's old hand-held fan,
My father's old hand-held fan
Has its teeth at the edge. [Answer: A machete/cutlass])

(45) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú ní eyín lẹ́gbẹ̀ẹ́ ẹnu méjèèjì
Ṣùgbọ́n ègbẹ́ ẹnu kan ló fi ń jẹ àgbàdo. [Answer: *Àdá*]

(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú has teeth on both sides of the mouth
But eats corn with only one side. [Answer: A machete/cutlass])

(46) *Òbéńbé oníbodè àtijọ́njọ́,*
Òbéńbé oníbodè àtìjọ̀njọ̀,
Tíí palẹ̀ lọ bẹẹrẹ lọ́tùún,
Tíí pàjùbà lọ bẹẹrẹ lósì. [Answer: *Ọkọ́*]
(The smallish old gatekeeper,
The smallish old gatekeeper,
Who cultivates a large farm on the right side,
Who cultivates a large farm on the left side. [Answer: A hoe])

The machete, a farm implement for removing weeds and pruning tree branches, is compared to human teeth in riddles 44 and 45 because this cleaver-like knife has two edges. Riddle 45 goes one step further, offering a paradox while describing this tool: the machete, though having teeth on both side of its mouth like humans, can only bite or chew on one side. This is so because only one side of the machete is always sharp

and used for cutting, while the other is blunt and rarely used by the farmer. Likewise, the hoe, a flat iron blade with a wooden handle, used by farmers for cultivation and creating ridges on their acreage, is presented in riddle 46 as a smallish gatekeeper who cultivates right, left, and center on a large piece of land.

Finally, the riddle genre also addresses storing harvested food items, especially bumper crops, including perishable items like corn, black-eyed peas, yams, the cassava, tobbaco leaves, peppers, and so on. Yorùbá farmers use barns for storage, each constructed with long grass. This barn (*abà* or *ahéré*) is usually round and built with hundreds of thousands of sheaves from a specific type of termite-resistant long grass. However, in spite of the excessive amount of grass utilized, the roof is usually suspended rather than touching the ground at the base of the barn. It is this special mode of construction that is reflected in riddle 47. The barn is an old woman who, although wrapping herself in thousands of layers of clothes, is still not completely covered:

(47) *Ìyá àgbà yẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀,*
Ó ró aṣọ lẹ́gbẹ̀rún-lẹ́gbẹ̀rún;
Síbẹ̀, aṣọ ọ̀hún kò balẹ̀.
(The old fat woman,
She tied [her] wrapper in thousands;
Yet, the cloth could not cover her fully.)

Also, the barn is described in another riddle:

(48) *Ó kún, kò mù mí tán;*
Ó gbẹ, ó mù mí tán.
(When filled up, I cannot hide in it;
But when empty, I can hide in it.)

When the barn is full of harvested crops, there is no room for anyone to enter. Only when the barn is empty can the farmer enter and exit easily.

Riddles on Animals (Forest and Domestic), Birds, and Insects

Generally speaking, animals, birds, and insects are frequent protagonists and subjects of African folklore. There are several principal reasons why

people tend to think about animals via oral literature. As James Fernandez (1995) suggests, it is difficult for a man to understand his own identity if not for "the 'other animals' that serve so conveniently and appropriately as a frame for his own activity and reflectivity" (iii). In other words, what is meant to be human is often understood by contrasting ourselves with, and recognizing similiarities to, animals in our environments. Aside from the Yorùbá hunter's oral poetic genre—*ìjálá*[3]—no other form of Yorùbá oral literature gives as much attention to animals, birds, and insects as the riddle and folktale. Like the *ìjálá* chant "whose burden is a verbal salute to a particular animal or bird" (Babalọlá 1966: 19), many Yorùbá riddles are composed to provide a character sketch of particular animals, birds, and insects. Such riddles contain information about physical features, characteristic cries, unusual traits, and other habits of specific fauna. However, those animals, birds, and insects that appear most frequently in riddles are the ones that have aroused the greatest interest on the part of farmers and hunters: domestic fowl (chicken and rooster), the ant, goat, wasp, bush-fowl (the partridge), snake, parrot, woodcock, duiker, elephant, and so on.

In terms of domestic animals featured prominently in riddles, these include the chicken, rooster, duck, dog, goat, and horse. In riddle 49, the hen (*adìẹ*) is described as "a blacksmith digging the ground to extract the iron ore" because of her habitual pecking of mother earth (the ground) when scavenging for food:

(49) *Alágbẹ̀dẹ babaà mi àtijọ́njọ́,*
Alágbẹ̀dẹ babaà mi àtìjọ̀njọ̀,
Bó ti ń fọ̀tún warin tútù,
Bẹ́ẹ̀ ló ń fòsì warin nílẹ̀.
(My father's old blacksmith,
My father's old blacksmith,
Who digs for iron ore with the right hand,
And digs for iron ore with the left hand.)

Riddle 50 compares the redness of the comb and wattle on the rooster's head and neck to the heat generated from the burning fire of an oven. Paradoxically, this burning fire fails to generate enough heat to protect the rooster from the cold weather:

(50) *Alágbẹ̀dẹ babaà mi àtijọ́njọ́,*
Alágbẹ̀dẹ babaà mi àtìjọ̀njọ̀,
Ó dáná sórí,

Ó ru àrò sọ́rùn;
Ó tún ń kígbe òtútù.
(My father's old blacksmith,
My father's old blacksmith,
Who has a burning fire on the head,
An oven on the neck;
But is still complaining of cold.)

In the next example, the riddle suggests that baby chicks (the chick—*ọmọ adìẹ/òròmọdìẹ*) are born twice—because the egg is laid first, then incubation follows prior to the chick finally hatching:

(51) *Ẹyẹ babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Ẹyẹ babaà mi kan làèlàè
Ẹ̀ẹ̀mejì ni à ń bí i.
(My father's old bird,
My father's old bird
That is born twice.)

In another riddle, the female goat (*ewúrẹ́*) is described as a promiscuous woman with a peeled knee because the goat's skin is covered with hair, except for her knee:

(52) *Kò gbélé ọkọ,*
Kò gbélé àlè,
Orúnkún rẹ̀ bó yòò̀.
(Though she stays neither with her husband,
Nor with her concubine,
She nevertheless has her knee completely peeled.)

In contrast, the male goat (*òbúkọ*) is compared to a bearded Muslim imam[4] because of the long hair on its chin:

(53) *Kò kéwú,*
Kò kírun,
Irùngbọ̀nọn rẹ̀ gùn ju tàfáà.
(He is neither knowledgeable in Qur`anic recitation,
Nor does he observes daily Islamic prayer,[5]
But his beard is longer than that of a Muslim imam.)

Among the forest animals found in riddles is the snail (*ìgbín*). With its hard, protective shell and habit of hiding under forest leaves, the snail crawls along, carrying its luggage-like shell. It is the answer to riddles 54–59:

(54) *Ìkòkò rúgúdú*
Tó ti ìdí bọ igbó.
(The small pot
That hides itself in the forest/bush.)

(55) *Kò lọ́wọ́, kò lẹ́sẹ̀;*
À ń wá a kiri nínú igbó.
(It has neither limb nor leg;
But we search for it in the forest.)

(56) *Kùkùté ń rìjò,*
Ó fi ilé rẹ̀ ṣe ẹrù.
(The tree stump was going on a journey,
And made its house the luggage.)

(57) *Ọlàjú kú,*
Ilé rẹ̀ ń dán.
(The famous one dies,
But his/her house is still clean.)

(58) *Ìyá ńlá ọ̀nà Ìkòyí,*
Ọjọ́ tó bá jẹ yọ̀ níí kú.
(The woman on the road to Ìkòyí,
She would die if she ever tasted salt.)

(59) *Àkùkọ babaà mi àtijọ́njọ́,*
Àkùkọ babaà mi àtìjọ̀njọ̀,
A pa á; a dín in; a jẹ ẹ́.
Ìgbà tí a sọ eegun rẹ̀ síta,
Ó tún dún kèkèréèke.
(My father's old rooster,
My father's old rooster,
We slaughtered it, fried it, and ate it.
But when we threw its bone [i.e., the snail shell] outside,
It made audible sounds like that of the crowing rooster.)

In riddles 54 and 55, the snail is described within the context of its abode in the forest, while riddles 56, 57, and 59 describe the snail shell as the house of the animal. In riddle 58, however, the snail is presented as an animal that is forbidden from tasting salt. This is because Yorùbá people usually use salt to reduce the sliming watery content in the snail shell when they are about to take the snail out of its shell for consumption.

On occasion, forest animals are represented jointly in a single riddle, as in riddle 60. The riddle includes the hare (*ehoro*), a fleet-footed game animal, the bush-fowl (*àparò*), an ever-vigilant bird, and the antelope (*ẹtu*), a horned mammal with an unusually large head.

(60) *Ó dúró ní pápá tolongó-tolongo,*
Ó rìn láàlà, yẹlẹnkù-yẹlẹnkù,
Olórí asínìnrín dodongbá-dòdòǹgbá.
Mẹ́ta là ń pa á,
Mẹ́ta là ń mọ́ ọ́n,
Ọmọ Láyílo.
(One that stood on a grassy field as if ready to run,
One that walked along the property line as if ready to fly,
And one that had a long bulky head.
The riddle is related to three-way dimensionals,
The answer is three-way dimensional as well,
The offspring of Láyílo.)

The parrot (*àwòko*), a forest bird frequently heard singing in the wild and quite adept (when domesticated) at imitating the human voice, is described below as:

(61) *Òrèbéjàn-án,*
Tíí jí kọrin.
(Òrèbéjàn-án,
That sings everyday.)

The vulture (*igún*), a black, bald-like bird, considered dirty and ragged-looking, is described thus:

(62) *Apárí àgbàlagbà,*
Tíí jẹ̀ nílé ẹlẹ́bọ.
(The bald old man,
That plays in the house of the sacrifice-maker.)

Yorùbá consider the vulture a sacred bird; therefore, killing it is taboo. Because the vulture is never attacked by humans, the bird fearlessly comes near people searching for food to eat. According to Wándé Abímbọ́lá (1976), "the vulture is a dirty bird and feeds on remains of dead animals and birds. He also feeds on sacrifices deposited in various shrines. He can be seen around shrines, hunting for sacrifices" (10). Mythology claims that the vulture cannot be prescribed as material for sacrifice, and that this is why the bird has no fear of man.

Large vipers like the gaboon viper snake (*ọ́ká*) and mammals such as the elephant (*erin*) are equally respresented in riddles. The *ọ́ká* is believed to hatch its young internally, after which the baby viper feeds on the mother until she dies. At that point, the baby viper eats its way out of her body. Thus the viper is presented in riddle form as a mother who must die before numerous children can issue forth:

(63) *Ìyá ńlá bìtìkùnbitikun;*
Bí kò kú kì í bímọ.
Bó bá kú tán,
Orísiríṣi ọmọ níí jáde láraa rẹ̀.
(A very fat mother;
If she does not die she does not give birth to children.
After she has died,
Different types of children come out of her body.)

Similarly, riddle 64 portrays the elephant (*erin*) in detail—dwelling on its mightiness, awe-inspiring appearance, and shrewdness. Also alluded to is its habit of snapping tree branches and uprooting huge trees with its trunk in order to create footpaths through the forest. The riddle references two major points: the elephant's ability to consume small animals and the cash value of its tusk and meat:

(64) *Òrúkú-tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú Tindì-tindì.
Bí Òrúkú bá ń roko, a dá ìrókò gbàtí;
Bí Òrúkú bá ń bọ̀ oko, a ya àràbà hàá.
Eyín ẹnu rẹ̀ owó.
Ẹran rẹ̀ owó.
Inúu rẹ̀ là ń bọ́ká.
Inúu rẹ̀ là ń bẹ́ran oníwo gàgàrà.
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì- tindì.

Whenever Òrúkú is going to the farm, s/he breaks the *ìróko*[6] tree into pieces.
Whenever Òrúkú is returning from the farm, s/he makes the *àràbà*[7] tree to snap.
Her/his teeth has high monetary value.
Her/his flesh has high monetary value.
S/he swallows the viper.
S/he swallows horned animals.)

Yorùbá riddles focus on both large and small forest-dwelling creatures. Indeed, ants and insects are included in the genre, such as the following riddle about the millipede (*ọ̀kùn*), a slow-moving arthropod that can have over seven hundred tiny legs. When the millipede dies, its body dries up and the carcass usually breaks into several segments. Hence the following description in riddle 65:

(65) *Àgbọ̀nrín ìgboro pa ara rẹ̀,*
Ó kun araa rẹ̀.
(The town antelope killed itself,
And carved up its own carcass.)

Similarly, the earthworm (*ekòló*), a long tube-shaped creature with a tendency to burrow directly downward into the soil, is presented thus:

(66) *Okùn tínínrín,*
Ó la àpáta já o!
(The long thin thread
That penetrates a rock!)

Black ants (*eèrùn*) that move together in thousands—lining up and crossing footpaths in early morning or late evening, and biting unsuspecting passersby who carelessly step on them—are described as a black head-tie in riddle 67 and a thousand soldiers in riddle 68:

(67) *Gèlè dúdú*
Tó gbàjá ọ̀nà.
(The black head-tie
That lay across the road.)

(68) *Ẹgbẹ̀rún-un sọ́jà ń yan lọ sógun,*
Ẹnìkankan kò si gbọ́ ìró ẹsẹ̀ẹ wọn.
(A thousand soldiers marching to the battlefront,
But no one hears their footsteps.)

Even the wasp (*agbọ́n*) that perches on the outer part of its hive is described as a homeowner residing outside rather than inside its house:

(69) *Àgbà dúdú orókè,*
Ó kọ́lé tán,
Kò gbé nínú rẹ̀;
Ìta rẹ̀ ló ń sùn.
(The old black one that lives at the elevated place,
S/he built a house
But does not live inside;
S/he sleeps outside its wall.)

Finally, the house fly (*eṣinṣín*) is described in riddle 70 as climbing (flying up to) the highest hill even though the same hill would be impossible for the riddle proponent to climb.

(70) *Òkè tí n ò le gùn,*
Ọmọ inúù mi le gùn ún.
(The hill I could not climb,
Someone much younger than I was able to climb with ease.)

Riddles on Human Anatomy and Physiological Functions/Processes

A significant number of riddles collected during fieldwork for this book involve human anatomy and physiology. Riddles cover the entire physiological spectrum—from sensory systems such as the eye, nose, ears, and tongue to eliminatory processes that produce mucus, excrement, urine, and so on. For instance, human hair (*irun orí*), easily cut but impossible to return to its exact point on the head after removal, is presented in riddle form as:

(71) *Wọ́n ní n mú un wá.*
Mo mú un wá.
Wọ́n ní n fi síbẹ̀ padà.
N ò mọ ibẹ̀ mọ́.
(They asked me to bring it.
I brought it.
They asked me to return it there.
I could not know the place again.)

Also, because the black man's hair tends to stand erect rather than droop, it is described as follows:

(72) *Pàsán orí òkítì,*
A-kú-má-ro̩.
(The whip on top of the anthill,
One-that-dies-but-never-droops.)

The human eye (*ojú*), organ of sight, is capable of viewing all things except itself:

(73) *E̩ni-e̩lé̩ni níí rí,*
Kò lè rí ara rè̩.
(It can see other people,
But cannot see itself.)

Likewise, the eyelid (*ìpénpéjú*) or top part of the eye, blinks and shakes briskly when we twincle the eye; however, no sound is heard. Hence, the riddle below:

(74) *A ń lu ìlù ní igbó Ìjan,*
A ò gbó̩ ní igbó Ìjan;
Òkè Ìjan sì ń mì tìtìtì.
(We are durmming in the Ìjan forest,
But we don't hear the sound [of the drumming] in the Ìjan forest;
Nevertheless, the Ìjan forest is shaking vigorously.)

The human nose (*imú*), organ of smell through which our breath passes, is described as "the one that does not sleep while everybody is asleep" because we breathe through the nose continously even while sleeping:

(75) *Gbogbo ilé yìí sùn,*
Kánńbó nìkan ni kò sùn.
(Everyone in this house was asleep,
Except Kánńbó.)

The human ear (*etí*), organ of hearing, is represented in both riddles below. Because ears are located on the side of one's head, it is impossible to see them, no matter how hard one tries:

(76) *A fo̩wó kàn án, ó wà níbè̩;*
A wo ibè̩, a ò rí i mó̩.

(When we touched it, it was there;
When we looked for it, we could not see it.)

(77) *Mo wo ọ̀tún,*
Mo wo òsì,
N ò rí iyeè mi;
Bẹ́ẹ̀, iyeè mi ò sì re ibi kan.
(I turned right,
I turned left,
I could not see my mother;
Even though my mother did not go anywhere.)

Similarly, the following riddle describes the human knee (*orúnkún*) as a body part one can touch while bending down, but which remains innaccessible when standing up straight:

(78) *Mo kúnlẹ̀, mo fàpò kọ́.*
Mo nàró, ọwọ́ mi ò tó àpò.
(I knelt and hung the bag.
I stood up but my hand could not reach the bag again.)

The eliminatory system is featured prominently in Yorùbá riddles, including the following waste products and processes: feces (*imí or ìgbẹ́*), urine (*ìtọ̀*), mucus (*ikun*), phlegm (*kẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀*), belching (*ìfẹ̀*), and farting (*isó*). Once food has been eaten and digested, nutrients are absorbed into the body while waste is eliminated. In the next riddle, excrement that is normally discharged and covered up with dirt is compared to a yam tuber hidden under the ridge of earth on a farm. Unlike the yam that must be uprooted for consumption, excrement is not.

(79) *Iṣu babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Iṣu babaà mi kan làèlàè.
Bí a kò bá ta omi sílẹ̀,
A kì í wà á.
(My father's yam tuber.
My father's yam tuber.
If we did not water the ground,[8]
We could not dig it up out of the ground.)

In the next riddle, one finds feces (*imí or ìgbẹ́*), urine (*ìtọ̀*), and farting (*isó*) as solutions.

(80) *Ọmọ ìyá mẹ́ta kan wà:*
Ọkan dá igbó kú sí.
Ọkan ń tọ ọ̀nà tóóró rọ̀run.
Ọkan lọ gbúù, a ò rí i mọ́.
Mẹ́ta là ń pa á,
Mẹ́ta là ń mọ̀ ọ́n,
Ọmọ Láyílo.
(There are three children of the same mother:
One finds a small bush to die.
Another finds a narrow path to die.
And one bursts into the air and disappears.
The riddle is related to three-way dimensionals,
The answer is three-way dimensional as well,
The offspring of Láyílo.)

Kẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀, the slimy discharge that humans spit, making a bass-like sound when hitting the ground, is presented in riddle form as:

(81) *Kò lọ́wọ́, kò lẹ́sẹ̀,*
Ó bẹ́ lu igbó pìì.
(It has neither legs or arms,
But jumps heavily into the bush.)

Similarly, mucus (*ikun*), another slimy waste product discharged from the nose, is humorously introduced in riddle form as the White man/woman (or European):

(82) *Òyìnbó a-múni-má-gbẹ́bẹ́,*
Tí ń yọjú wo ilé ọmọ onílẹ̀.
(The strict White man/woman (the European),
Peeping into the house of the natives.)

Note that mucus is referred to as European because of its creamy color. On another level, comparing mucus to a European is a not-so-subtle criticism of the Europeans' incursion into Yorùbáland, and a clarion call for revolt. If mucus is not removed from the body and remains stuck, the body becomes unhealthy. Therefore, removal is essential for purification. According to the riddle, then, Europeans must be deposed as colonizers in order to restore wellbeing to the homeland.

Riddles Pertaining to Mathematics, Logic, and Science

Many Yorùbá riddles teach children and young adults how to count and how to employ successful strategies for working with numbers. Some of these riddles focus on the human body, specifying the number of eyes, ears, limbs, buttocks, breasts, and so on. Here are three examples.

(83) *Àgbá olódó kiribítí,*
Àgbá olódó kiribìtì,
Ọpá méjìlélógbọ̀n ni a fi ń lù ú;
Kó tó ró kiribítí. [Answer: *Eyín àti ekìrí ẹran*]
(There was a round mortar-cask,
There was a round mortar-cask
That has to be beaten with thirty-two drumsticks
Before it ever sounds round. [Answer: Thirty-two teeth chewing a piece of meat])

(84) *Ọmọ ìyá márùún ń rode ìyàwó.*
Mẹ́rin ń kọ́wọ̀ọ́ rìn;
Èkarùún wọn ya àso. [Answer: *Ìka ọwọ́ máràrún*]
(Five siblings are going for a wedding.
Four are walking together;
The fifth is a lone ranger. [Answer: The five fingers])

(85) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú ní ẹsẹ̀ méjì,
Ó jókòó lórí ẹlẹ́sẹ̀ mẹ́rin,
Ó ń retí ẹlẹ́sẹ̀ mẹ́jọ.
Mẹ́ta là ń pa á,
Mẹ́ta là ń mọ́ ọ́n,
Ọmọ Láyílo. [Answer: *Ẹyẹ lékelèké, màlúù, àti kòkòrò ara màlúù*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
The two-legged Òrúkú,
Seated on a four-legged,
Waiting for the eight-legged.
The riddle is related to three-way dimensionals,

The answer is three-way dimensional as well,
The offspring of Láyílo. [Answer: A bird on a cow waiting for a tick])

At a glance, we learn that humans have thirty-two teeth (riddle 83) and five fingers and that while four of these fingers—the index, middle, ring finger, and pinky—are close in proximity, the thumb alone stands separately (riddle 84). Lastly, riddle 85 provides basic information about avian and bovine anatomy (two and four legs, respectively) while also alluding to the tick, which has eight. These riddles provide a basis for ongoing practice in mathematics.

Furthermore, riddles may convey more advanced mathematical concepts related to dimension, shape, size, space, and time. For example,

(86) *Baba ga.*
Ìyá kúrú.
Wọ́n ní ọmọ méjìlá. [Answer: *Aago*]
(The father is tall.
The mother is short.
They have twelve children. [A watch or clock])

This riddle implies multiple concepts, not only about the watch's symmetry but also about social structure. The watch is a unitary system, like a family. The twelve hourly divisions are presented as children. The points are visited regularly by the hour and minute hands. The short hour hand may symbolize the mother while the long minute hand, the father. Why? Generally, Yorùbá women are shorter than their husbands. Also, the traditional Yorùbá image of a father is that of a roamer, one who is rarely at home. The mother is more sedentary and present. Similarly, the minute hand is more mobile and the hour hand more stationary. For every hour, the minute hand moves twelve steps while the hour hand moves only one step. So it is the hour hand that is in most constant contact with the stations, much as the mother is more frequently in contact with her children. However, both parents form a complementary relationship in raising a family, just as the hour and minute hands work together to indicate time. This riddle, therefore, makes reference to mathematical and social relationships simultaneously.

The next riddle features a child that crawls in infancy, walks on two legs as a youth, and uses a cane in old age:

(87) *Bàbá àlọ́ kan, àtijọ́njọ́,*
Bàbá àlọ́ kan àtìjọ̀njọ̀.

Ẹsẹ̀ mẹ́rin ní fií rìn láàárọ̀,
A fi méjì rìn lọ́sàán,
A sì tún fi mẹ́ta rìn lálẹ́.
(The old man in the old riddle,
The old man in the old riddle,
He walks on four legs in the morning,
Two legs in the afternoon,
And three legs in the evening.)

The focus of this riddle is age and the passage of time. Also inferred are important ideas about development and growth. Essentially, an individual's experience in childhood and adulthood determines what s/he becomes in old age. The average of these experiences paints the picture of the final personality. The equation may be expressed as follows:

$$\frac{4 \text{ (crawling)} + 2 \text{ (walking)}}{2 \text{ (average)}} = 3 \text{ (Walking + Cane)}$$

In terms of the nuclear family, each family member is available to help care for the infant. These unit members include father, mother, brother, and sister (four). In adulthood, an individual relies on her/himself and on the spouse (two). In old age one relies on oneself, one's spouse, and one's children (three). The offspring are represented by the third leg, or walking cane. Interestingly, movement is from quadrangular to biangular to triangular. Geometrically speaking, a four-sided figure is called a plane and a three-sided figure, a space. The two-sided form is neither a plane nor a space. For stability, three legs are central. Two legs mean a return to precariousness and instability. A four-legged object with one or two legs disproportionate in length will always rest on three legs. The fourth leg is therefore an addition that is not essential. Using this model, it is rational to state that, as a person matures, s/he sheds dependency and rapidly achieves equilibrium. The—four-two-three model, then, signifies infancy (dependency), maturity (independence), infirmity (consolidation). Thus the reader will note that, while appearing deceptively simple, Yorùbá riddles may in fact carry complex implications.

Riddles can also be used as springboards for teaching science. As discussed earlier, Yorùbá riddles frequently deal with topics related to biology, physics, anatomy, and botany.

In the following riddle, the human heart (*ọkàn*) is the solution.

(88) *Aagọ babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Aagọ babaà mi kan làèlàè
Ìṣẹ́jú-ìṣẹ́jú ló ń ṣiṣẹ́.
(My old father's watch,
My father's old watch
Works every second.)

The basic comparison here is between the watch ticking and the heart thumping. As a central organ of the body, the heart pumps, distributes, and recycles blood through the arteries, veins, and capillaries. These three primary passageways may be compared to the three modes through which a watch indicates time: the hour, minute, and second hands. There is also the quarterly division of both that can be tabulated as follows:

Watch	**Heart**
12:00–3:00	Left atrium
3:00–6:00	Left ventricle
6:00–9:00	Right ventricle
9:00–12:00	Right atrium

The most important point of the riddle is that the heart *is pumping every second*. When it stops, life ceases, unless of course sustained by advanced technological devices. Another example previously mentioned is apropos to organic function.

(89) *Òyìnbó kan, òyìnbó kàn,*
Fèrèsé ní tií bẹ́jú wọ́lé [Answer: *Ikun*]
(There is a particular White man/woman (European),
S/he peeps into the house through the window [Answer: mucus])

Here, the nose (*imú*) is symbolized by a window. It is the body's inlet for fresh air and outlet for deoxygenated air, similar to any dwelling's window that circulates air. It is no exaggeration to say that an entire biology lesson on the respiratory process could be built around this riddle.

One may then make a case for integrating oral literary forms (such as riddles) into science instruction. For instance, a Yorùbá biology teacher may take the following riddles regarding the moon, the sun, and the stars, and apply them to a lesson on photosynthesis.

(90) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Bí Òrúkú bá farahàn lọ́sàán,
A pòórá bó bá di alẹ́. [Answer: *Oòrùn*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú shows itself in the afternoon,
But disappears at night. [Answer: The sun])

(91) *Lágúnregé, tó ń bẹ lóko Láyílo.*
Látànkálẹ̀, tó ń bẹ lóko Láyílo.
Lábọ́larundúró, tó ń bẹ lóko Láyílo.
Mẹ́ta là ń pa á,
Mẹ́ta là ń mọ̀ ọ́n. [Answer: *Oòrùn, ìràwọ̀, òṣùpá*]
(The-one-that-is round-and shapely, at Láyílo's farm.
The-one-that-spreads-all-over, at Láyílo's farm.
The-one-that-stays-upright, at Láyílo's farm.
The riddle is related to three-way dimensionals,
The answer is three-way dimensional as well,
The offspring of Láyílo. [Answer: The sun, the stars, the moon])

(92) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú rẹwà ní ìhòrìhò
Ju ìgbà tó wọ́ṣọ lọ. [Answer: *Òṣùpá*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú is more beautiful when naked
Than when fully clothed. [Answer: The moon])

(93) *Ọ̀pá tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́ kan àtọ́dúnmọ́dun,*
Ọ̀pá tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́ kan àtìgbàdégbà
Ó kanlẹ̀, ó kan ọ̀run gbanrangandan. [Answer: *Òjò*]
(The old long walking-cane,
The old long walking-cane
That streches from earth to heaven. [The rain])

In riddles 90 and 91, the sun is portrayed as a patron of space. Vital to both plant and animal life, the sun facilitates photosyntheis and supplies humankind with light, heat, and Vitamin D. By appearing during the day

and disappearing at night, it regulates our daily life patterns. Together with other climatic factors, it determines the farming cycles of planting and harvesting. Therefore, it is a kind of a master. In riddle 91, the sun, moon, and stars are described as crops on the farmland of Láyílo. Here lies the idea of provision and sustenance of life. Riddle 92 deals with the moon, which is associated with beauty and romance—its soft illumination creating an emotive and pacifying atmosphere. All of these natural phenomena (the moon, the stars, the sun, and the rain) seem eternal, with their own seasons and cycles. Even if not visible and apparent in the moment, one may be assured of their ongoing presence.

Likewise, a physics teacher introducing a lesson on the relationship of energy to labor may use the following riddle about the hoe:

(94) *Òbéńbé, oníbodè àtijọ́njọ́;*
Òbéńbé, oníbodè àtìjọ̀njọ̀
Tíí palẹ̀ lọ bẹẹrẹ lọ́tùún.
Tíí pàjùbà lọ bẹẹrẹ lósì
(The smallish old gatekeeper;
The smallish old gatekeeper
Who cultivates a large farmland on the right side,
Who cultivates a large farmland on the left side)

The lesson might be developed as follows: when land is being cultivated, energy passes from the farmer and his or her labor through the hoe to the soil. The level of cultivation may be calculated according to the area of earth developed—in which case the amount of labor is equivalent to the force applied multiplied by the distance covered. Hence the following formula will be generated:

Work (W) = Force (F) × Distance (D)

These few examples illustrate that riddles may indeed serve as useful tools when introducing students to academic disciplines such as mathematics, logic, and science.

Riddles and Cultural Norms

Simply stated, culture represents the beliefs and ways of life of any given society. A people's culture is reflected in their language, religion, intellectual achievements, customs, practices, economic activities, fashion, forms

of entertainment, food, and so on. Each separate culture views certain things as desirable and establishes its own set of standards. Anybody who behaves in opposition to these standards or norms is generally scorned. Standards vary according to gender, age, and social position, and from one community to the next. From a cultural point of view, the Yorùbá have developed strategies for introducing customs and traditions to their children—riddles being one such strategy. Yorùbá riddles may refer to myths and legends, while others call attention to history, agriculture, wildlife, and various other aspects of the environment. For example, a number of Yorùbá riddles specifically address basic household tools, tools that existed long before contact with the Europeans. Thus one finds the following riddles based on common kitchen utensils such as the mortar (*odó*), a wooden utensil used in Yorùbáland for pounding yam into *iyán*, a major food staple:

(95) *Kò-ṣéé-má-nìí,*
A yí i tì sí igun ilé.
(An-indispendable-tool,
Often rolled to the corner of the house.)

This riddle may be solved by considering the following: virtually every Yorùbá family eats pounded yam (*iyán*), and practically on a daily basis. Therefore, every household necessarily owns a mortar, which is usually kept in a kitchen corner for easy access. The pestle (*ọmọ odó*), with which yam is pounded, is represented in the riddle below as a tall young woman with an aggressive attitude toward her mother:

(96) *Ọmọge gbộngbộnràn,*
Tố ń bá ìyáa rẹ̀ jà.
(A tall and plump lady,
She is always fighting with her mother.)

Similarly, *orógùn* is a wooden tool about one yard long used for stirring yam flour (*èlùbọ́*) in boiling water. The result is yet another food staple known as *àmàlà* or *ọkà*. In the next riddle, this particular wooden tool is compared to a large-headed fish swiming in the ocean.

(97) *Òkun ń hó yeee,*
Ọsà ń hó gùdùgùdù,
Eja ńlá korí bộ́ ọ́.
(The sea was screaming with waves,

The lagoon was boiling with waves,
The big-headed fish entered it head on.)

Prior to the introduction of gas or electricity, the Yorùbá people used to cook on a set of three mud stones (*ààrò*) strategically arranged in a V-shaped triangle. The *ààrò* is an oven powered by firewood and, for it to cook effectively, all three of the mud stones are indispensable. Hence the logic behind this riddle:

(98) *Ọmọ ìyá mẹ́ta,*
Wọ́n fòde ṣọ̀kan o!
(Three children of the same mother
Make a common day festive.)

Likewise, the following riddle refers to firewood that is used to heat the mud-stone oven. If two large pieces of firewood are ignited at the start of cooking one's breakfast, they will have burned out completely by the time lunch and dinner are over. Hence the comparison to two elephants that consume each other in the Kóro forest:

(99) *Erin méjì jẹraa wọn títí,*
Wọ́n jẹraa wọn tán nígbóo Kóro.
(Two elephants eat each other,
To a finish at Kóro forest.)

Another unique type of Yorùbá riddle depicts royalty. The Yorùbá nation, a highly developed aristocratic system of government, is based on traditional hierarchical structures. All Yorùbá communities, to a large extent, share identical cultural traits and claim descent from a common ancestor (Odùduwà). However, a single political authority has, up to this point in time, never effectively controlled the entire Yorùbá nation. One may assume that all Yorùbá towns and communities established themselves independently, with their own chosen leaders—individuals whose ability and ingenuity the people depended on for social, political, and economic organization. Therefore, one can easily imagine how diverse forms of political organization emerged rather than a single all-embracing governmental entity. Differing in form and practice, these towns and villages nevertheless share basic governing similarities, such as a crowned king (known as *ọba*) or an uncrowned ruler (known as *baálẹ̀*). Whether the leader is crowned or uncrowned depends upon the status of the town. The crowned kings are highly placed in society and well respected, not

only by their subjects but also by the uncrowned rulers (*baálẹ̀*) in neighboring villages.

With this information in mind, let's explore the following riddles with an apparent incongruity and inconsistency between the riddle statement and its solution. One notices an opposition, a denial, or contradiction of known facts and experience.

(100) *Kí ni ó dé ilé ọba tí kò ṣí fìlà?* [Answer: *Agbè ẹmu*]
(What is it that reaches the king's house but does not take off its cap? [Answer: Keg of palm wine])

(101) *Kí ni ó ń kan ọba ní ìkó?* [Answer: *Abẹ ìfárí*]
(What is it that gives the king a knock on the head? [Answer: The razor])

(102) *Kí ni ó ń bá ọba mu ọtí?* [Answer: *Eṣinṣin*]
(What is it that drinks wine with the king? [The housefly])

(103) *Kí ni ó ń lọ lójúde ọba tí kò kí ọba?* [Answer: *Àgbàrá òjò*]
(What is it that passes by the king's house without greeting him? [Answer: Rain torrent])

The incongruity in all four riddles is at once apparent to anyone familiar with Yorùbá culture. Indeed, these questions seem impossible to contemplate. For example, every male citizen is taught from a very young age to remove his cap before the king's house, regardless of whether the king is present. In riddle 100, however, a keg of palm wine keeps its "cap" (the frothy top) even before the king. Although it is absolutely inconceivable that anyone could knock the king on his head, riddle 101 has a logical solution: the razor used to cut the king's hair (that gently taps him on the head). In riddle 102, the house fly may "have a taste" of the king's wine if not swatted away. A strong torrent that begins to flow after a heavy rainfall accounts for the solution to riddle 103. It may indeed "pass through the front of the king's house without stopping by to pay homage to the king." As demonstrated, incongruity is one of the features that lends these riddle their originality, which makes the audience stop and think. Incongruity provides the shock effect, similar to the effect of metaphor.

Also represented in riddles are spirits and celestial bodies, as well as mythological gods and goddesses. The Yorùbá strongly believe in life after death. Indeed, the dead are regarded as an integral part of one's extended family on earth, and they maintain the right to continued involvement

in their descendants' affairs. The Yorùbá thus envision a human soul after death, believing that each individual ascends skyward to take her/his proper place among the ancestors.

From this belief come the sayings *baba pa ipò dà* (father has changed his position/status), *Ìyá dara pọ̀ mọ́ àwọn arálẹ̀* (mother has joined those who died before her), and *ọbaá wàjà* (the king has disappeared in the attic). The Yorùbá often invoke ancestral spirits to bear witness to oaths or serve as consultants prior to an important family meeting. It is not unusual for family agreements to be consummated on their graves. Another key Yorùbá belief concerning death is that the human soul may ascend to heaven, and then (if it so desires) return to earth in the form of a baby, a new life. Thus Yorùbá parents give commemorative names to children born shortly after the death of their grandparents—names such as Babátúndé or Babájídé (father comes back again) for a boy, or Ìyábọ̀ or Yétúndé (mother returns) for a girl. This Yorùbá belief in life after death is brought to the fore in the following two riddles. The dried leaf is referred to as a partially alive/partially deceased being.

(104) *A pe òkú,*
Òkú jẹ́.
A pe alààyè,
Kò fọhùn. [Answer: *Ewé gbígbẹ àti ewé tútù*]
(We called on the dead,
The dead answered.
We called on the living,
S/he did not answer. [Answer: Fresh (green) leaves and dead leaves])

(105) *Ìgbà tó wà láàyè,*
A kí i, kò dáhùn.
Ìgbà tó kú tán,
A kọjá lẹ́hìnkùlée rẹ̀,
Ó ń ṣe "ẹ pẹ̀lẹ́ o!" [Answer: *Ewé gbígbẹ*]
(While s/he was alive,
We greeted her/him, but s/he did not respond.
But when dead,
We passed through her/his backyard,
And s/he is saying "Hello!" [Answer: Dead or dry leaves])

When one walks on dried leaves, a crunching sound is made—here compared to the ability of the dead to talk. This analogy is only possible due to the Yorùbá belief in life after death.

One critical clarification is necessary here: the Yorùbá attitude toward all those who die young, who die by drowning, hanging, or automobile accident, or by such terrible afflictions as leprosy, is different. Such unfortunate individuals, whose deaths are attributed to the devil, are denied entry into heaven. This intercession by the devil prevents them from joining their ancestors in heaven, and they are barred from association with the living on earth (Àjùwọ̀n 1989). The only course that is open to them, according to the Yorùbá belief system, is to join a group of fairies and make their abode in giant forest trees, in the mountains, rivers, or in outlying hills. Many Yorùbá traditional folk stories often include fearful tales about those who dwell in such places.

Moreover, beyond their belief in an afterlife, Yorùbá hold fast to the existence of other spirits that, although invisible, play an important part in daily life. These include spirits of the forest (*iwin*), as well as spirits associated with particular trees (*ẹbọra*), such as *ìrókò* and those associated with anthills (*ọ̀gán*). A typical fairy is *egbére*, which is prone to tears and believed to be capable of menacing humans, especially hunters. Fairies, according to Yorùbá, appear in a multitude of physical forms. Some are two-headed, others one-legged, one-eyed, two-mouthed; some have missing arms or limbs. Yorùbá believe that when these fairies decide to trick people, they can assume human form. These fairies are considered the most dangerous since they are virtually impossible to recognize. Their powers are most malevolent at night when they come out to fetch their food. Such nocturnal outings have resulted in Yorùbá riddles like the following:

(106) *Kò lọ́wọ́,*
Kò lẹ́sẹ̀,
A ń wá a ká igbó. [Answer: *Ìgbín*]
(Without arms
Nor legs,
We are looking for it in the forest. [Answer: The snail])

(107) *Kò lọ́wọ́*
Kò lẹ́sẹ̀,
Ó ń gbé ọmọ tuntun jó. [Answer: *Pèpéle*]
(Without arms
Nor legs,
S/he can carry a baby. [Answer: Mud platform serving as a bed])

(108) *Pátápa sáré lọ,*
Pátápa sáré bọ̀,

Pátápa dórí àpáta, ó pòórá. [Answer: *Pátákò ẹṣin*]
(Pátápa runs up,
Pátápa runs down,
Pátápa disappears on the rock. [Answer: A horse's footprint])

Riddles 106–108 conjure fairy spirits without limbs, and spirits that can appear and disappear at will. The surprising solutions bring audiences back from spirits and fairies to the mundane: snail, mud-platform bed, and horse's footprint. The existence of fairies—and people's encounters with them, pleasant and bitter—figures prominently in many Yorùbá riddles.

Witchcraft, another manifestation of Yorùbá fairy spirits, is also represented in riddles. The belief in witches and in bewitchment has survived for centuries and continues to be very significant among the Yorùbá to this day (Washington 2005). Fear of witches looms large in Yorùbá consciousness and practice. Whenever reference is made to witches or to their name (*àjẹ́*), it is prudent to touch the ground with one's fingertips, saying *bi a bá perí akọni, a ń fi ọwọ́ lalẹ̀ ni* (if a person of violent character is mentioned, a mark is made on the ground), while those seated stand up briefly as a mark of respect and humility (Verger 1978: 3). The Yorùbá associate witchcraft with women and wizardry with men. Witches possess considerable superhuman, mystical powers and can perform wonders. They can hurt their victims, kill an enemy, block the fortunes of others, and cause a business failure for a neighbor. In short, they are capable of doing anything that is evil, and all with impunity. Most importantly, the Yorùbá believe that witches have the ability to transform themselves into birds, cats, sheep, or goats, and to congregate in the forest at night under giant trees—feasting on the flesh and blood of their victims. The belief in the existence of witches and their nefarious activities informs the following riddle which, in reality, describes a type of pepper seed (*ata*). When many seeds (or fruits) of this plant are added to food, the mouth burns like an evil witch.

(109) *Orúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Orúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú bí igba ọmọ,
Gbogbo wọn ló ya àjẹ́. [Answer: *Ata*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú that gave birth to two hundred children,
And all of them turned to witches. [Answer: Pepper plant fruits/seeds)

As might be expected, in a culture with strong beliefs in fairies and mystical causation, protective rituals and sacrifices are regularly performed. People must be protected from the wrath of fairies; fairy-human social relationships must be harmonized. Therefore, whenever any misfortune occurs, and the source remains unknown, both humans and invisible spirits are subjects of divination by the Yorùbá.[9] To complete any divination process, there is always a prescribed sacrifice. Whether the prediction of the divination is good or bad, the client must always offer sacrifice. If the prediction is good, a sacrifice will quicken a positive outcome and if the prediction is evil, a sacrifice will help dispel the ill-effects. Therefore, after completing the long process of divination, the diviner will advise the client specifically what type of sacrifice to make. The client then buys the necessary articles required for the sacrifice and brings them to the diviner. According to Wándé Abímbọ́lá (1976), diviners believe that the psychological function of sacrifice is critically important: "They maintain that sacrifice helps to unite all the forces both natural and supernatural (including the fairy spirits) that operate in Yorùbá society" (37).

Broadly speaking, four forces interplay in Yorùbá ritual: the gods, the ancestors, witches and other supernatural powers, and human beings. The function of sacrifice is to enlist the support of these four forces to achieve whatever ends are desired, ensuring that none of the forces work against one's purpose. It is apparent in divination texts that human beings play an essential role in making a sacrifice successful. That is why, during the offering of any sacrifice, people are invited to the shrine of the god to whom sacrifice is being made—not only to watch the ritual but also to eat part of the food used for the sacrifice. This aspect of Yorùbá culture is being played upon in the composition of the two following riddles:

(110) *Òrìṣà kan ń bẹ lójúde Olúfẹ̀,*
Ojoojúmọ́ níí gbẹbọ. [Answer: *Ẹnu*]
(There stands a deity in front of the palace of Olúfẹ̀—King of Ifẹ̀,
It takes sacrifice everyday. [Answer: The human mouth])

(111) *Òòṣà kan wà lójà Àkẹ̀sán,*
Ojoojúmọ́ níí gbẹbọ.
Bó ti ń gbẹbọ lọ́wọ́ ọmọdé,
Ló ń gbà lọ́wọ́ àgbà.
Bó ti ń gbà lọ́wọ́ ọkùnrin,
Ló ń gbà lọ́wọ́ obìnrin. [Answer: *Àkìtàn*]

(There stands a deity at Àkẹ̀sán market [in Ọ̀yọ́],
It takes sacrifice every day.
As it takes sacrifice from the young,
So it takes from the old.
As it takes sacrifice from men,
So it takes from women. [Answer: A dumping area or rubbish heap])

In the first riddle, the human mouth receiving food is likened to a deity being offered sacrifice.[10] In the second example, the dumping area where garbage is disposed of daily (at the popular Àkẹ̀sán market in Ọ̀yọ́ town) is also presented as a deity accepting sacrificial offerings.

Yorùbá religious mythology is further represented in riddles through gods and goddesses. The Yorùbá conceive of the cosmos as consisting of two distinct though inseparable realms: the visible, tangible world of the living, known as *ilé ayé*, and the invisible spiritual realm (*ọ̀run*) inhabited by the deities (gods and goddesses) and the Supreme Being Himself (Fádípẹ̀ 1970). In the next riddle the earth is compared to a gigantic piece of excrement covered by an extensive leaf—the sky.

(112) *Mo su imi ràbàtà,*
Mo fi ewé ràbàtà bò ó. [Answer: *Ilẹ̀ àti sánmọ̀*]
(I passed out huge excrement,
And covered it with a large leaf. [Answer: The earth and sky])

The Yorùbá worship gods and goddesses (the *òrìṣà*), deified ancestors, and/or personified natural forces. The *òrìṣà* are said to be closely associated with the living and frequently involved in human affairs. Therefore, they connect man with God the Supreme Being (Barber 1981). These deities enjoy a dual grouping, based on their personalities and modes of action. The first group includes cool, calm, gentle, temperate gods, denoted symbolically by the color white, while the second group is harsh, aggressive, demanding, and quick-tempered, gods symbolized by red or black. However, this classification has nothing to do with issues of good and evil. All the deities, like human beings, are made up of positive and negative traits. Also, each *òrìṣà* has a favorite food, color, and paraphernalia documented in oral literature. For example, in the following riddles with *Òrìṣà Ọ̀ṣun*, *Òrìṣà Ọ̀ya*, and *Òrìṣà Èṣù* as solutions, respectively, each *òrìṣà* is presented in the riddles within the context of his or her favorite paraphernalia. Only those audience members who are well-informed

regarding Yorùbá indigenous religious practice will be able to decode each riddle correctly.

(113) *Bí ìyá bá ń tòde bọ̀,*
A mú idẹ wálé. [Answer: *Òrìṣà Ọṣun*]
(When mother is returning home from an outing,
She will come home with brass. [Answer: The goddess Ọ̀ṣun—known for her love of brass])

(114) *Iyá kò gbóhun méjì rọjà,*
Ìwo ni wọ́n ń bá ṣe. [Answer: *Òrìṣà Ọya*]
(Mother did not take two items to the market,
She dealt mainly with horns. [Answer: The goddess Ọya. Her devotees love to decorate her shrines with ram horns])

(115) *Igba baálé*
Níi bá yangíí mí. [Answer: *Òrìṣà Èṣù*]
(Two hundred heads of household
Live with the laterite brown rock. [The god Èṣù—laterite brown rock adorned with palm oil symbolizes the shrine of the deity])

Riddles on Language, Humor, Satire, and Entertainment

Up to this point, the Yorùbá riddle has been presented as a metalingual poetic genre. By its very nature, the riddle is essentially an interrogation involving language and its usage. Metaphor is basic to riddle and, as such, one is forced to match lexical items in context in order to delineate the unsuspected semantic relationship between them. This involves a (silent) metalingual process. Yet, some riddles seem to be more specifically metalingual than others. Their function seems to be to direct the attention of the respondents to particular sectors of the language with a view to investigate *how* the language works. What is important in such riddles is not the figurative element as much as the aesthetics involved in language usage.

As a system of human communication, language relies on a combination of sounds to convey meaning. Traditionally, people associate certain words to signify certain specific objects or ideas. In some cases, the sounds in riddles may not form anything that may be called a meaningful

word. These riddles are referred to as "phonologues, where the sound imitates the appearance, behavior, or use of the object by a sound" (Yáì 1977: 440). Most phonologues play with alliteration and thus assist riddle participants (especially children and teenagers) in pronounciation. For instance, in riddle 116 below, the tenor in the solution to the riddle is *not* being metaphorically compared with the vehicle in the riddle stem.

(116) *Gígaa rẹ̀ tó erin.*
Gànnàkùu rẹ̀ẹ́ tó ẹ̀fọ̀n.
Ó lójú lábẹ́. [Answer: *Ilé*]
(It is as high as an elephant.
It is as big as a buffalo.
It has eyes and genital organs. [Answer: The house])

Rather, attention is being directed to breaking the dead metaphors *ojúlé* and *abẹ́lé* into their components (*ojú* + *ilé* = lit. "the eye of the house" [doorway of house] and *abẹ́* + *ilé* = lit. "genital organs of the house" [crawlspace of the house]). As Yáì (1977) rightly noted, this riddle is in fact "a brief and brilliant exercise in Yorùbá morphology" (441). It shows clearly the simplification rule in the lexicalization process at work in metaphorical phrases like *abẹ́ ile*, *ojú ilé*, and so on. Metalingual riddles based on dead metaphors are indeed a productive process in Yorùbá. One can, for instance, apply the same analysis to many other dead metaphors involving words like *ẹnu* (*ẹnu ọ̀nà*—doorway, *ẹnuu bodè*—border gate), *etí* (*etí òkun*—beach, *etí odò*—riverbank), *inú* (*inú ilé*—inside the house, *inú ọkọ̀*—inside the car), and the like. Other examples of metalingual riddles include the following:

(117) *Kí ni ó ń jórúkọ mọ́ **ẹ̀jẹ̀** tí kò sì l**éjẹ̀** ?* [Answer: *Igbá**jẹ̀***]
(What is it that has blood in its name, but has no blood?
[Answer: A calabash])

In riddle 117 the rule of word composition appears in filigree, and in riddle 118 what is emphasized is the phonic similarity among the three solutions that form a paradigm.

(118) *Àgbàágbà mẹ́ta forúkọ pẹ́ ara wọn.* [Answer: *Àá**ké**, ọbọ**ké**, ìrè**ké***])
(Three elders who are related by names. [Answer: The axe, monkey, and sugarcane])

Therefore, riddles 117 and 118 seem to be insisting on the phonic (versus meaning) aspect of lexical items, thereby pointing to the basic linguistic principle of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

Similarly, in a good number of other riddles the solution shares one or more phonemes with some lexical elements in the descriptive part of the riddle. So subtle and productive is this feature that it cannot be taken for granted. What is more important, in many cases, the phonic resemblance may be paired by semantic connections. Five examples are given below with the common phonic units highlighted in the Yorùbá examples.

(119) *Àgbộ̀nrín ìgboro pa araa rẹ̀*
Ó ***kun*** *araa rẹ̀.* [Answer: *Ọ̀kùn*]
(The antepole that killed itself
And dissected itself. [Answer: A millipede or centipede])

(120) ***Aj****ímákání,*
Ọba Láyílo. [Answer: ***Aj****á*]
(The one who leaves his/her sleeping mat untidy every morning,
The king at Láyílo (town). [Answer: A dog])

(121) *Àkààku baba erin,*
*Ọ̀jọ̀ǹbẹ̀lẹ̀ baba àkàà****ku****.*
*Àkàà****ku*** *bá erin lọ́nà*
Ó gbé e mì.
*Ọ̀jọ̀ǹbẹ̀****lẹ̀*** *bá àkàà****ku*** *lọ́nà*
Ó mì ín. [Answer: ***Ikú*** *àti i****lẹ̀***]
(Àkààku, the lord of the elephant,
Ọ̀jọ̀ǹbẹ̀lẹ̀, the lord of Àkààku.
Àkààku met the elephant on the way
And swallowed it.
Ọ̀jọ̀ǹbẹ̀lẹ̀ met Àkààku on the way
And swallowed it. [Answer: Death and mother-earth])

(122) *Igbó tó gba erin, tó gba ẹfọ̀n*
*Kò gba àj****àǹtálá****.*
*Àj****àǹtálá*** *dé ibẹ̀,*
Ó fi ìwo kọ́ igi. [Answer: ***Aláǹta****kùn*]
(The forest that acommodated the elephant and the bushcow
Could not accommodate a smaller animal.
When the smaller animal got there,

Its horn got stuck in the treebranch. [Answer: A spider])

(123) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú bí igba ọmọ,
Ó yọ ***ìlagbà*** *lé gbogbo wọn lọ́wọ́.* [Answer: *Igi* ***ìgbá***]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú has two hundred children,
And gave to each a whip. [Answer: The locust bean tree])

In an even more complex situation, one finds the syllables of the riddle solution discontinuously inserted into the text of the riddle statement itself—thereby calling attention to the phonic similarity.

(124) *Àkùkọ babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Àkukọ babaà mi kan làèlàè;
A gbé e dé ọjà,
Ó *ń* ***ké****: "jọ̀wọ́ mi,*
*Mo mọ̀nà i****lé****."* [Answer: ***Òkèlè***]
(My father's old rooster,
My father's old rooster;
When taken to the market,
He started shouting, "Leave me alone;
I know my way back home." [Answer: A morsel of food])

At the same time, some riddles are more subtle, such as those in the form of puns and witticisms. Punning, of course, refers to the ability to twist words. For example, "lie" can mean settling the body in a horizontal position, or it can mean being untruthful. One can play around with such words to create a mélange of confusion and humor. Consequently, some metalingual riddles involve contrasting the normal versus metaphoric use of words, such as:

(125) *Nǹkan mélòó níí pani*
Tí a kì í kú, tí fi í fini sílẹ̀ láìpa? [Answer: *Ebi, òjò, oòrùn, èéfín, ẹrù, ọtí*]
(What kills one
And yet one does not die,
but leaves one alive? [Answer: Hunger, rain, sun, smoke, luggage, alcohol]

In the Yorùbá language, the action verb *pa* (to kill) is used as the predicate of *ebi* (hunger), *òjò* (rain), *òòrùn* (sun), *èéfín* (smoke), *ẹrù* (luggage), and *ọtí* (alcohol)—expressing their potentially deleterious effects on one's health. Hence the ambiguity. Metalingual riddles like these are tools for exploring linguistic ambiguities and ambivalences. Their cognitive role is markedly important, particularly in an oral culture.

I do not mean to suggest that this feature is common to all Yorùbá riddles; however, its frequent appearance precludes the suggestion that mere chance accounts for the phenomenon. Moreover, it seems as if deliberate choice inspires the matching of two words phonologically related in the riddle question and answer, particularly when the lexical item in the riddle question is onomatopoetic or ideophonic in nature. Thus the choice of *ajá* (dog) as the solution to *Àjímákání* (The one who leaves his/her sleeping mat untidy every morning) in riddle 120 must be intentional. The creator of the riddle, for euphonic reasons, certainly preferred *ajá* to other domestic animals like *ewúrẹ́* (she-goat), *òbúkọ* (he-goat), *adìẹ* (chicken), *àgùtàn* (sheep), and so on, all domestic animals that also "leave their sleeping mat untidy every morning." Similarly, one notices that *ìlagbà* in riddle 123 is deliberately matched with *ìgbá*, rather than with its synonyms *pàṣán*, *ọ̀rẹ́*, or *ẹgba*. These observations lead one to ask: in oral literature is the artiste conscious of the stylistic structures of text? One can only suggest that, in the case of Yorùbá riddles, stylistic devices are sensed at least on a subliminal level. Regardless of conflicting answers to the above question, philosophically speaking, it would seem that a dialectical tension is at work behind Yorùbá riddles; the proponent and the respondent view each other as friends and adversaries simultaneously. The proponent both conceals and reveals the solution to the repondent.

As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, riddles are often inspired by one's physical environment. They may also serve as vehicles allowing the author to comment on human affairs. This concluding section deals particularly with humorous riddles, and particularly those that make liberal use of satire. Satire is a unique literary genre conveying social criticism through humor. When literature is intended to entertain, satire may often be the preferred genre. The word "entertainment" seems simple, yet may include complex aspects. People refer to entertainment to mean amusement when engaging in activities like listening to music, watching films, or attending sports events. Entertainment is thus the pursuit of pleasure. In literature, however, the concept must be broadened to encompass active participation in the creation and consumption of the work of art. Especially with oral literature, the performer and audience often derive equal pleasure and entertainment from participating. So when referring

to the entertainment aspect of riddles, there is no such thing as a passive audience experience.

Yorùbá riddles may offer serious social commentary (regarding human behavior) and do so with great humorous effect. Consider the following riddles on food and eating:

(126) *Òrúkú, Tindí-tindí.*
Òrúkú, Tindì-tindì.
Òrúkú párí, ó sì wẹ̀wù funfun. [Answer: *Iyán*]
(Òrúkú, praise named Tindí-tindí.
Òrúkú, praise named Tindì-tindì.
The bald-headed Òrúkú is dressed in white. [Answer: Pounded yam])

(127) *Bí àárá bá sán, tọmọdé-tàgbà a yọ kùmọ̀, yọ kóńdó.* [Answer: *Oúnjẹ jíjẹ*]
(Whenever thunder sounds, people rush for clubs. [Answer: When food is ready, people hurry to the table.])

(128) *Ọfàa babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Ọfàa babaà mi kan làèlàè;
Ọrun márùún la fií ta á. [Answer: *Òkèlè + ìka ọwọ́ márààrún*]
(My father's old spear,
My father's old spear;
We shoot it with five arrows. [Answer: The morsel of food + the five fingers])

(129) *Ọbẹ̀ẹ babaà mi kan láéláé,*
Ọbẹ̀ẹ babaà mi kan làèlàè;
Omitoro rẹ̀ nìkan là ń mu
Dídà là ń da ẹran rẹ̀ nù. [Answer: *Ìrèké*]
(My aged father's stew,
My aged father's stew;
We drink only the soup
And discard the meat. [Answer: The sugarcane])

In the above riddles, humor is mainly conveyed through hyperbole—the use of exaggeration to amuse and criticize. In riddle 126, the quality of being bald is tranformed into a humorous trait when applied to the smooth, flexible and silky *iyán* (pounded yam), the most popular Yorùbá food staple. Riddle 127 depicts the arrival of food at the table as

an invasion; one imagines people defending their rightful portion with clubs. The imagery here lies in the fact that the Yorùbá use their bare hands to eat. With fingers and palm, they tear off and shape the boluses of pounded yam. The fingers, in this process, actually form club-like fists. In this battle of eating, fought (figuratively) with a spear and five arrows as riddle 128 suggests, the eater (who may be a glutton) faces defeat when her/his stomach cannot hold any more. Finally, riddle 129 provides a paradox: meat is thrown away in preference for soup. Usually, most people would choose meat over soup. However, in the case of sugarcane, solid residue must be discarded and the liquid juice swallowed.

In Yorùbá society, sex and sexual organs are not usually openly discussed.[11] As a result, euphemes serve a distinct purpose, allowing people to eschew direct references that may be considered crude and culturally unacceptable. Although discussion of sex and sexual organs is often embarassing, we are all sexual beings and cannot pretend otherwise. By euphemizing sexuality, riddles underscore the importance of sex and sexual organs and allow us to accept their inevitable presence. Riddles also train children and young adults to refer to sex and sexual organs politely, in a socially acceptable language wrapped in humor. The following four riddles exemplify this language:

(130) *Olófèèré ọ̀nà Ìbàdàn*
Ó yé ẹyin méjì
Ó wá fàgbọ̀n lé e. [Answer: *Okó àti ẹpọ̀n*]
(The Olófèèré bird on the road to Ìbàdàn
That laid two eggs
And placed its chin on them. [Answer: Male genital organs—the penis and testicles])

(131) *Kò léyín;*
Kò lérìgì,
Ó ń rorín alẹ́. [Answer: *Òbò*]
(It has no teeth;
It has no molars,
Yet it brushes its mouth at night. [Answer: Female genital organ—the vagina])

(132) *À ń gúnyán,*
Ajá ń jó. [Answer: *Ọmú/ọyàn obìnrin*]
(While we are pounding yam,
The dog is dancing. [Answer: A woman's breast])

(133) *Bẹ́ńbẹ́ méjì,*
Wọ́n fẹ̀hìn ti osè. [Answer: *Ọmú/ọyàn obìnrin*]
(Two *bẹ̀ńbẹ́* drums,[12]
Resting against a baobao tree. [Answer: A woman's breast])

While riddle 130 compares a man's testicles to eggs (based on similarity of shape), riddle 131 compares copulation between a man and woman to the cleaning of one's mouth with a toothbrush. The man's penis is obviously the toothbrush, while the vagina is symbolized by a mouth with neither teeth nor molars. Similarly, riddle 132 describes a woman's breasts as dancing dogs. This is meant to be a humorous reference to the way female breasts move up and down when a woman pounds yams with mortar and pestle. In riddle 133, female breasts are compared to large Yorùbá *bẹ̀ńbẹ́* drums resting against the baobao tree—to describe the position of a woman's breasts against her chest.

The intention of this chapter has been to highlight the entertainment aspect of Yorùbá riddles yet, equally important, to demonstrate their role as an effective means for training children and young adults—intellectually, morally, and socially. Young people enjoy riddles for their entertainment value while adults honor and appreciate the riddle's instructive potential. The ineffable variety of content and form contained in Yorùbá riddles cannot be disputed and reflects a rich diversity of influence. Before the introduction of Western education to Yorùbáland, riddles and folktales were the principal means of shaping character in children and young adults. Today, however, there is a new perception—that the nation's formal educational system is sole custodian of Yorùbá children's growth, including their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual development. This chapter has addressed this misperception by suggesting that one cannot properly educate a child separate from his/her cultural environment.

As a training apparatus for sharpening a child's intellect and for supporting her/his cultural understanding, riddles have been employed quite effectively for generations. When carefully considered and organized, riddles may be used to teach young people in a manner perhaps more effective than any other genre of folk literature. In Yorùbáland, the inherent potential of riddles to instruct is based on their unique question-and-answer format, the playful manner in which competition is emphasized, and the varied and engaging quality of topics addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

The Dynamics of Tale-Riddling

Riddles and related enigmatic genres turn, characteristically, on ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning. Hence, it is scarcely surprising that these enigmatic forms are themselves generically ambiguous. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, distilling the basic riddle forms is difficult enough, but the capacity of the riddle and related enigmatic forms to blend with other genres, as in dilemma tales, riddle ballad, neck riddles,[1] and so on, complicates matters even further. This observation echoes Richard Bauman's (1986) view that "the blending of riddle and narrative is especially slippery, making for expressive complexes that are marked by a high degree of generic indeterminacy" (62). Similarly, F. J. Norton (1942), in his foundational survey of the classic neck riddle, observes that there is considerable "variation in the relative importance of tale and riddle" in the oral tradition (27). A number of other scholars, including Max Lüthi (1976), John Dorst (1983), and Roger Abrahams (1985) have also written on the blending of riddle and folktale. In Bauman's review of some of these works, he contends that while Lüthi's work contains a number of suggestive (if impressionistic) insights, the essays by Dorst and Abrahams are more productive in treating the interaction of riddle and narrative as a problem in genre theory. Bauman also comments on the problem brought to bear by M. M. Bakhtin (1986), in particular Bakhtin's notion of secondary (complex) speech genres. Bakhtin draws a distinction between primary (simple) genres and secondary (complex) genres. "During the process of their formation," he writes, "[secondary genres] absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communication. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones" (2).

For his part, Dorst discusses one specific type of tale-riddle, the neck riddle, in terms of its reliance on the imagery of the grotesque, "a symbolic correlative of the generic yoking of opposites that secondary genres represent and, in terms of Bakhtin's notion of chronotope, the distinctive time/place orientation of each primary genre that shapes its content and compositional structure must be negotiated in secondary genres as contrastive chronotopes interact" (Bauman, 1996: 62). Abrahams, in turn, draws on his extensive corpus of ethnographic data concerning expressive culture in the West Indies to illuminate the range of combinatory variability in the blending of riddle and narrative, and to relate the dynamic of generic definition and manipulation as locally constituted to broader social and cultural factors.

Neither Dorst nor Abrahams, however, offers the sort of close form-function-meaning analysis that would appear to be called for by the Bakhtinian perspective and related efforts in current genre research. That is what I propose to undertake in this chapter: an analysis of Yorùbá tale-riddle in terms of formal features, the functional loads and interrelationships of these constituent features, and the implications of this generic blending for the field of meaning that the resultant hybrid forms suggest.

The Yorùbá folktale, popularly known as *Àlọ́ Ìjàpá*, (the Tortoise Tales), constitutes a narrative subgenre that appears to be popular principally among the masses, or the nonhegemonic members of various Yorùbá communities. Such tales are told with a view to examining secular social conflict. However, tale-riddles are specifically what Doke (1947) refers to as "problem" tales, or so-called dilemma tales (Bascom, 1975)—a class of tales in which problems are created by a storyteller and concerted efforts are made to resolve the dilemma or puzzle through a narration presented logically by the same storyteller. Such a form lacks the pith and brevity usually associated with the common regular riddle, although it shares with the latter the element of intellectual play involved in working out an answer. There are two types of tale-riddles in Yorùbá: those based on Ifá corpus and those that are non-Ifá-based.[2] These stories may be rendered either entirely in poetry or in prose, or in a poetic-prosaic combination form.

The data that follows include seven riddle narrative texts that I recorded at different times during my 2007–2012 fieldwork in Nigeria. The first tale, titled "How Tortoise Married Three Princesses on the Same Day," is a non-Ifá-based tale-riddle delivered entirely in prose. The second text, "How Tortoise Exchanged Six Peanuts for 120,000 Cowries," is a non-Ifá-based poetic tale-riddle. The third text, "Ifá told Four Tale-Riddles in

Odù Ogbèwẹ̀yìn," is an Ifá-based poetic riddle narrative (actually, a set of four tales combined into one). The last four riddle-narrative texts are also Ifá-based and similar to the stories in the third text; however, the four tales are delivered in a poetic-prosaic combination form. Here are the texts.

Text 1: Non-Ifá-Based Prosaic Tale-Riddle

How Tortoise Married Three Princesses the Same Day

Long, long ago, there was a king in Tortoise's native town who had three daughters, who were identical triplets. These princesses were considered to be the most beautiful, intelligent, and arrogant persons in the town. They all refused love offers from all the men that approached them, saying that some of the men were too ugly and others too stupid. Responding to pressure from their father and a lot of gossips about their abnormally high taste by the male members of the community, the three girls announced the conditions under which they would accept any man's offer of marriage. Each agreed to marry any man who knew her real name. It is the culture in this town that princes and princesses are not addressed by their real name in public.

The king immediately instructed his bondsmen to ring the bell right round the four corners of the town, summoning everyone to a general meeting in his palace the following day. Nearly everyone was seated by the scheduled time, and all started to wonder what the subject of the discussion was going to be. When the king knew that everyone had settled down, human, animals, and birds, he started to address them, saying, "You all are most welcome to my palace. It is not often that I call this kind of meeting, in which no one is left out in my domain. I have called the meeting to discuss an important personal matter with you. My three daughters are of age, and I have made a personal decision to give them out in marriage to whichever person that is able to know their individual names; and give you seven days from today to give the solution."

To the entire listening audience, humans, animals, and birds alike, this seemed a difficult task, since the custom in this town was that princesses were not addressed by their real names outside the palace and palace workers were not eligible to marry princesses. The usual thing is to call them "Princess" outside the palace; therefore, to know their real names thus remained a puzzle. However, since the girls were paragons of beauty, and were pleasing to many people, serious efforts were made, of course unsuccessfully, by everybody to know their real names.

Few days later, Tortoise went to the palace to inform the king that he was going to reveal the real names of the three princesses in a matter of days, and ask if there were any other conditions. The palace guards laughed at him, saying that the king did not need to set additional conditions since they never thought of Tortoise as an eligible person. Tortoise laughed back at them, assuring them that he was in the race anyway.

Tortoise suddenly remembered that Woodpecker was once a slave or chattel in the palace for several years, working in lieu of payment of the loan his father took from the king. After visiting many neighboring villages in search of Woodpecker, Tortoise finally found him; and Woodpecker agreed to assist Tortoise to resolve the puzzle before dawn. So, in the middle of the night, just before the cock crows, Tortoise and Woodpecker quietly crawled to the back of the king's palace, and climbed a tree. When they got to the top of the tree, they hid in the leaves. When it was daytime, the sun was up and scorching, the king's three daughters came out and stayed under the tree, taking fresh air. They soon got deeply involved in their play. Woodpecker sensed their deep involvement, and so threw down one of the spinning tools (*kẹ̀kẹ́ òwú*) that he had, right in the middle of the playing girls. One of them quickly took it up, and finding it wonderfully beautiful, started to sing:

I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òpobípobí; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òpobìpobì; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òrípolóbì o, *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*

Tortoise quickly memorized the names while Woodpecker soon sent another spinning tool, throwing it down right in the middle of the play-involved girls; a second girl took it delightfully and similarly began to sing:

I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òpobípobí; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òpobìpobì; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òrípolóbì o, *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*

Tortoise, again, rehearsed the names, and was fully delighted. When Woodpecker saw that the girls are again deeply involved in their play, and were greatly overwhelmed by their new-found spinning tools, he span the third and last tool, throwing it right down in their middle to their great joy. This time the third girl took it and similarly started singing:

I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òpobípobí; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òpobìpobì; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
Òrípolóbì o, *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*
I find a spinning tool; *gbinrin, àjàlúbalẹ̀, gbinrin.*

Tortoise quickly rehearsed their names once again, and the three girls soon left for home with their spackling tools.

Tortoise later sent a message to the king that he was ready to tell the names of his three daughters the following day. The king laughed and said that things had not gone so bad that Tortoise would know the details of life in the palace. Anyway, in readiness, the king ordered his bondsman to summon all his subjects to his palace for another meeting. The king was seated at a place where everyone saw him very distinctly. Tortoise had also arrived, and was seated in a conspicuous place as well. Everybody, including the three princesses, jeered at him, drawing attention to his ugliness and poverty but assuring themselves that Tortoise would be the last person to know their names. The king recounted the promise of the Tortoise to tell the real names of his three daughters, stating that everyone had been called to listen to him.

Tortoise stood up, walked from one corner to the other, reshaping his dress and giving off all sorts of self-apportioned praise names. He arrogantly opened his mouth talking, "I, the only husband of Yánníbo; here I am. I, the only husband of the king's three daughters, Here I am." The king yelled at him: "Tell us the names of the girls quickly. We are less interested in your self-praises; if you fail, you are done for." Tortoise, again, went up and down, walking sedately and said courageously: "The name of your first daughter is Òpobípobí." The king was surprised, but nevertheless raised up his flywhisk acknowledging that Tortoise was right. Tortoise rose up again and said: "The name of your second daughter is Òpobìpobì." The king was struck dumb; but he waved his flywhisk reluctantly to show that Tortoise was correct. The Tortoise, this time with more vigor and assurance, said: "The name of your third daughter is Òrípolóbì." The king threw down his flywhisk in annoyance, but Tortoise

was not bothered. Instead, he urged the king to send for palm-wine and food to entertain him as his new son-in-law.

The king protested that the culture did not allow one man to marry three sisters. Tortoise responded by saying that he had fulfilled the only condition set for the marriage and then assured the king that he had more intimate knowledge of the palace and would not hesitate to tell the assembly of citizens about the secret of the palace. The king then agreed and arranged a marriage ceremony.

After the marriage, the king took Tortoise to a house within the palace walls where he and his wives should stay for the purposes of comfort. Tortoise refused the offer, adding that a married man lived with his wives in his house and that the three princesses should get ready to go with him to his hut at the other end of town. That was how Tortoise successfully married three princesses in one day.[3]

Text 2: Non-Ifá-Based Poetic Tale-Riddle

How Tortoise Exchanged Six Peanuts for 120,000 Cowries

Mo járọ́;
Mo járọ̀ o.
Àrọ̀ mọ̀jàlà!
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, já, já,
Mo jálé owó.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, já, já,
Mo jálé ọmọ.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, já, já,
Mo jálé Olódùmarè pẹ̀ẹ́;
Níbi tí Ìjàpá ti ń fọ́nnu
Pé òun lè sẹ̀pà méfà degbàafà kójúmọ́ tó mọ́.
Ìjàpá nì lọ ilé àna rẹ̀ lójọ́ kan,
Lọ bẹ̀bẹ̀ pé kí wọn dínwó-orí Yánníbo
Láti ọgbọ̀n owó ẹyọ sí méwàá ;
Kóun lè rówó fi dókòwò lẹ́hìn ìyàwó.
Ìyá ìyàwó, onísòwò ní:
"Ìjàpá, ọ̀lẹ̀lú, òwò wo lo lè ṣe?"
"O ò si lọ ṣàgbàṣe kóo fi sanwó-orí"
Ojú ti Ìjàpá, ẹsẹ̀ rẹ̀ wọ́lẹ̀ gẹẹrẹ.
Ló bá ní òun mòwò ju ọ̀pọ̀lọpọ̀ ìyálọ́jà lọ,

Àwọn tíí jí ọjà àgbè tà nílọ́ọ́po méta.
Ni Alábahun bá ń lérí fún àna rẹ̀
Pé òun lè sẹ̀pà méfà dẹgbàafà kójúmọ́ tó mọ́.
Nìyáa Yánníbo bá kọ́yàn pèlú Alábahun.
Pé, b'Íjàpá bá lè ṣe bó ti wí
Yó fẹ́ Yánníbo láìsan kọ́bọ̀.
Bí kò bá wá lè ṣe é, kó gbàgbé ìyáwó.
L'Àjàpá bá gbèpà méfà lọ́wọ́ àna rẹ̀;
Ló bá gbìn ín sóko ara rẹ̀.
Ikún ni ìdébè hú u jẹ.
N'Ìjàpá bá bu Ikún láṣọ so;
Ó ní, àfi bí òun gbẹgbàafà, owó èpà.
Ikún ní, ojú ní rójú ṣàánú.
N'Ikún náà bá gbìnpà sóko ara rẹ̀.
Àparò nìhú u jẹ.
N'Ikún náà bá bu Àparò láṣọ so;
Ó ní, àfi bí òun gbẹgbàafà, owó èpà.
Àparò ní, ojú ní rójú ṣàánú.
L'Àparò bá yẹ́yin méjì sójú ọ̀nà.
Erin nì tẹ̀ é fọ́.
L'Àparò bá bu Erin láṣọ so
Ó ní, àfi bí òun gbẹgbàafà, owó èpà.
Erin ní, ojú ní rójú ṣàánú.
L'Erin bá gbẹ́dò lẹ́bàá ọ̀nà,
Abiyamọ nìdébè bù mu.
L'Erin bá bu abiyamọ láṣọ so.
Ó ní, àfi bí òun gbẹgbàafà, owó èpà.
Abiyamọ ní, ojú ní rójú ṣàánú.
L'Abiyamọ bá pọn ọmọ rẹ̀ lódì.
L'Akọ̀pẹ bá sẹ̀ é.
L'Abiyamọ bá bu akọ̀pẹ láṣọ so;
Ó ní, àfi bí òun gbẹgbàafà, owó èpà.
Akọ̀pẹ ní, ojú ní rójú ṣàánú.
L'Akọ̀pẹ bá mú ọ̀pẹ gùn lódì.
Láyaba bá rí i, ló ní:
"Àràmọ̀ǹdà!, Ẹ wo akọ̀pẹ yìí
Bó ti ń gọ̀pẹ lódì."
L'Akọ̀pẹ bá bu ayaba láṣọ so;
Ó ní, àfi bí òun gbẹgbàafà, owó èpà.
Ayaba nì kó ẹgbàafà f'Ákọ̀pẹ.
Akọ́pẹ nì kó ẹgbàafà f'Ábiyamọ.

Abiyamọ nì kó ẹgbàafà f'Érin.
Erin nì kó ẹgbàafà f'Áparò.
Àparò nì kó ẹgbàafà fún Ikún.
Ikún nì kó ẹgbàafà f'Álábahun.
Alábahun nì kó ẹgbàafà fána ẹ̀ kójúmọ́ ó tó mọ́.
Ohun t'Álábahun ṣe jọ àna rẹ̀ lójú.
Ẹṣẹ̀kẹṣẹ̀ ló fà Yánníbo fún un.
(I have a riddle to be resolved;
And, swiftly the puzzle will be resolved.
What a great puzzle!
In my search for solution to the puzzle,
I stumbled on a house full of money.
In my search for solution to the puzzle,
I stumbled on a house full of children.
In my search for solution to the puzzle,
I stumbled on the house of Olódùmarè;
Where Tortoise was boasting
That he can turn six peanuts into 120,000 cowries before daybreak.
Tortoise visited his prospective mother-in-law on a particular day,
To plead with her to reduce the dowry to be paid on his fiancée, Yánníbo
From thirty cowries to ten;
So that he can still have some money left after the marriage to establish a business.
The prospective mother-in-law, a wealthy trader, butted in saying,
"Lazy Tortoise, what do you know about business?"
"Why don't you go and work as a laborer for the money with which to pay the dowry?"
Tortoise felt humiliated and embarrassed by this interruption [of Yánníbo's mother].
He then told the woman that he knew more about business than most market women,
Who simply tripled the price of goods usually stolen from farmers.
The Tortoise then boastfully told his prospective mother-in-law
That he can turn six peanuts into 120,000 cowries before daybreak.
Yánníbo's mother offered to enter into a bet with Tortoise.
Saying, that if Tortoise succeeded
He would be allowed to marry Yánníbo without paying any dowry.
But that should he fail, the courtship would be terminated immediately.

Tortoise then collected six peanuts from his prospective mother-in-law;
He thereafter planted the peanuts on his farmland.
It was the Squirrel that unearthed the peanuts and ate it.
Tortoise challenged Squirrel for eating the peanuts;
And demanded for 120,000 cowries, being the cost of the peanuts.
Squirrel begged Tortoise for leniency and time to pay up.
So, Squirrel in turn planted peanuts on his own farmland.
Bush-fowl (Partridge) unearthed the peanuts and ate it.
Squirrel challenged Bush-fowl for eating the peanuts;
And demanded for 120,000 cowries being the cost of the peanuts.
Bush-fowl begged for leniency and time to pay up.
So, Bush-fowl in turn laid two eggs on the pathway.
Elephant passed by and mistakenly stepped on the eggs, breaking them.
Bush-fowl (Partridge) challenged Elephant
And demanded for 120,000 cowries, being the cost of the peanuts.
Elephant begged for leniency and time to pay.
So, Elephant in turn dredged a pond by the roadside,
The Nursing-mother stopped by the pond and drank from it.
The Elephant challenged the Nursing-mother for drinking from his pond.
And demanded for 120,000 cowries, being the cost of the peanuts.
The Nursing-mother begged for leniency and time to pay.
So, the Nursing-mother got hold of her baby,
And tied the baby with a lash legs upwards and head downwards.
A Palm-tapper (saw the Nursing-mother mounting her child upside-down, and) cautioned her.
The Nursing-mother then challenged Palm-tapper for cautioning her;
And demanded for 120,000 cowries, being the cost of the peanuts.
The Palm-tapper begged for leniency and time to pay.
So, Palm-tapper got hold of his climbing rope, setting his head downwards and his legs upwards.
The Queen saw him and exclaimed:
"Wonderful! Imagine this Palm-tapper
As he climbed the palm-tree in a wrong position."
There and then, the Palm-tapper challenged the Queen for poking her nose into his business;
And, demanded for 120,000 cowries, being the cost of the peanuts.

The Queen then gave 120,000 cowries to the Palm-tapper.
The Palm-tapper in turn gave the 120,000 cowries to the Nursing-mother.
The Nursing-mother in turn gave the 120,000 cowries to the Elephant.
The Elephant in turn gave the 120,000 cowries to the Bush-fowl (Partridge).
The Bush-fowl (Partridge) in turn gave the 120,000 cowries to the Squirrel.
The Squirrel in turn gave the 120,000 cowries to the Tortoise.
The Tortoise in turn gave the 120,000 cowries to his prospective mother-in-law before dawn.
Marveled by what she saw in Tortoise's craftiness.
She immediately approved of Yánníbo's marriage to the Tortoise.)[4]

Text 3: Ifá-Based Poetic Tale-Riddles

Ifá told Four Tale-Riddles in Odù Ogbèwẹ̀yìn

Ọ̀rúnmìlà ló ní mo járọ̀,
Mo járọ̀ọ̀ mi,
Àrọ̀ mo já ọ pàtì.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, jáá, já,
Tí mo jápá ajá,
Mo já fùfùléèléè àdàbà,
Mo já'lé Ọlọ́un pẹ̀rẹ́.
Asẹ́ta ń lọ sílé Adó,
Ẹ̀rìnmì ń lọ sóde Ọ̀wọ̀,
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní òun ń lọ sókèè'Gẹ̀tí,
Ńnúu'lée baba òun.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà lóun rí kini kan o.
Wọ́n ní, "baba Akẹ̀yọ̀,
Wọ́n ní kín lo rí?"
Ó ní òun mọ̀ rẹ́ni tọ́ kọ́lé tán,
Tí ò sùn nínúu rẹ̀,
Tí ń sùn lẹ́hùìn rẹ̀.
Wọ́n ní: "o gbésẹè rẹ dé o.
Wọ́n nírọ́ ló tó yìí báyìí.
Èèyàn ṣe le kọ́lée rẹ̀ tán,

Tí ó mọ́ọ lọ rèé sùn lẹ́hìn'lé ọ̀hún?
Ǹjẹ́ èyíun wa dáa báyìí?"
Ó (ọ̀rúnmìlà) ní òun ò kúkú parọ́.
Ó ní, "kò burú, ẹ kálọ"
Wọ́n sì ń tẹ̀ lé e.
Nígbà tó dé ibi tí agbọ́n kọ́lé sí,
Ó bá nàka sí i,
Ó ni, "ta ló nilé yìí?"
Wọ́n ní, "agbọ́n ni."
Ó ní, "níbo ni wọ́n wà un ná?"
Wọ́n ní, "lẹ́hìn ilé ni."
Ó ní, "ṣe kò sí yàrá níbẹ̀ ni?"
Wọ́n ní, "ó wà níbẹ̀."
"Kín ni kò wá jẹ́ kó gbébẹ̀?"
Wọ́n bá dákẹ́, wọ́n ń wò ó.
Ó ni, "ẹni tó kọ́lé tán,
Tố ń sùn sẹ́hìin rẹ̀ nù un."
Wọ́n ní àwọn gbà.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ló ní mo járọ̀;
Mo járọ̀ọ̀ mi.
Àrọ̀ mo já ọ pàtì.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, jáá, já,
Tí mo jápá ajá,
Mo já fùfùléèléè àdàbà,
Mo já'lé Ọlọ́un pèrẹ́.
Asẹ́ta ń lọ sílé Adó,
Èrìnmì ń lọ sóde Ọ̀wọ̀,
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní òun ń lọ sókèè'Gẹ̀tí,
Ńnú ilée baba òun.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà lóun rí kiní kan o.
Wọ́n ní "baba Akẹ̀yọ̀,
Kín lo wa rîi?
O tún dé kọ́?"
Ọ̀rúnmìlà lóun rí kiní kan sẹ́ẹ̀.
Wọ́n ní, "bí irúu kín lo wa tún rí?"
Ó ní òun rẹ́ni tó lẹ́nu tí ò sì le sọ̀rọ̀.
Wọ́n ní, "kò lẹ́nu ni!"
Ó ní ó kúkú lẹ́nu
Ó ní kò si sọ̀rọ̀.
Wọ́n ní o tún dé kọ́?
Wọ́n ní, "ta ló lẹ́nu tí ò lè sọ̀rọ̀?"

Ó ní wọn ó lọ mú obìnrin kan wá.
Nígbà tí wộ́n mú un dé,
Ó ní kí wộ́n ó tú aṣọ nídìí rẹ̀;
Ó sì fọwọ́ kàndí ẹ̀.
Ó ní, "kí lèyí?"
Wộ́n ní "òbò ni."
"Ṣé kò lẹ́nu ni?"
Wộ́n ní ó lẹ́nuù.
Ó ní "alẹ́nu mọ́ sọ̀rọ̀ nù un."
Wộ́n ní àwọn fara mọ́ ọn.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ló ní mo járọ̀;
Mo járọ̀ọ̀ mi.
Àrọ̀ mo já ọ pàtì.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, jáá, já,
Tí mo jápá ajá,
Mo já fùfùléèlée àdàbà,
Mo já'lé Ọlọ́un pẹ̀rẹ́.
Aséta ń lọ sílé Adó,
Ẹ̀rìnmì ń lọ sóde Ọ̀wọ̀,
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní òun ń lọ sókèè'Gẹ̀tí,
Ńnúu ilée baba òun.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní òun rí kiní kan o.
Wộ́n ní kí lo tún ló o rîì?
Irọ́ rẹ yìí,
Ǹjẹ́ kò ní lẹ́yìn báyìí?
"Kín lo tún ló o rí o?"
Ó ní òun rí nǹkan sẹ́ẹ̀.
Ó ní, òkú ajá,
Ó ní, ó jẹ̀kọ jàyè lọ o.
Gbogbo wọn rẹ̀rìín lọ gbáà,
Wộ́n ni, "o ti wá gbé e dé gbáà.
Eléyìí ni yó yí ọ lọ́wọ́.
Kó o wí pé ní òkú ajá jẹ̀kọ jàayè lọ?
Òkú ajá, bó bá ti ṣe le jẹ̀kọ jàayè lọ,
Ọ ọ̀ ha jẹ́ káwọn ó rí i?"
Ó ní wọn o lọ rèé májá ńlá kan wá;
Kí wọn ó sì tọ́jú agbộn ẹ̀kọ kan pẹ̀lú ẹ̀.
Wộ́n bá fajá kalẹ̀,
Wộ́n sì gbágbộn ẹ̀kọ tìí.
Ajá ò sì tíì jẹun láti bí ìjẹta.
Wộ́n bẹ̀rẹ̀ sẹ́kọọ́ hó fájá.

Ajá gbé èkìíní, ó gbé èkejì,
Nígbà tí yó fi gbé ìkẹta,
Lajá bá ń narùn tan tan tan.
Ajá ò lè jẹun mọ́.
Ó ní wọn ó kó igi tì í,
Kí wọn ó lu ajá náà pa.
Wọ́n yọgi tì í, wọ́n bá pa á.
Wọ́n ní "àwọn ó wo bí yó ṣe jẹ̀kọ jààyè,
Lónìí lo ó ríró rẹ."
Nígbàa wọ́n pa ajá tán,
Ó ní wọn ó wì í.
Wọ́n bá wì í,
Wọ́n fọ́ ọ́ nù.
Ó tójú epo pupa bíi jálá kan.
Wọ́n fọ ìsaasùn nù,
Ni wọ́n gé e lékìrí-lékìrí,
Wọ́n sè é.
Ó jiná,
Iná dùn ún.
Wọ́n gúnyán tì í,
Wọ́n rokà tì í,
Wọ́n wá agbọ̀n ẹ̀kọ bíi méta.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní "ẹ̀yin èèyàan wa,
Ó ní, iṣẹ́ yá,
Ó ní, ẹ má ṣàfira."
Wọ́n jẹ agbọ̀n ẹ̀kọ kìíní,
Wọ́n fẹran ajá jẹ ẹ́.
Wọ́n jẹ agbọ̀n ẹ̀kọ kejì,
Wọ́n jẹ ìkẹta.
Wọ́n tún parí iyán,
Wọ́n tún ń wò rá, rà, rá,
Pé ibo ni oúnjẹ tún kù sí.
Ó ní, "mo ní òkú ajá jẹ̀kọ jààyè lọ,
E níró ni.
Gbogbo oúnjẹ tẹ́ ẹ gbé kalẹ̀,
Òun wa dà báyìí?"
Gbogbo wọn hó lọ yèèè.
Wọ́n ní àwọn gbà fún un.
Wọ́n ní bẹ́ẹ̀ ni, kò purọ́.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ló ní mo járọ̀;
Mo járọ̀ọ̀ mi.

Àrọ̀ mo já ọ pàtì.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, jáá, já,
Tí mo jápá ajá,
Mo já fùfùléèlée àdàbà,
Mo já'lé Ọlọ́un pèrẹ́.
Asẹ́ta ń lọ sílé Adó,
Ẹ̀rìnmì ń lọ sóde Ọ̀wọ̀,
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní òun ń lọ sókèè'Gẹ̀tí,
Ńnúu'lée baba òun.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà lóun rí kini kan o.
Wọ́n ní "baba Akẹ̀yọ̀,
Wọ́n ní kín lo wa póo rí?
Èé ti jẹ́?
Kí lo tún rí gan-an?"
Ó ní "òkú ewúrẹ́,
Ó ní, ó mọ̀ leè ké ju ààyè lọ.̀"
Wọ́n ní "òkú ewúrẹ́,
Ewúrẹ́ tó ba ti kú ní yó tún wàá ké?"
Wọ́n ní "o tún gbẹ́se rẹ dé nù un."
Ó ní kí wọn ó lọ méwúrẹ́ wá.
Wọ́n kógi bò ó dáadáa.
Wọ́n lù ú, dáadáa,
Ó ké, ké, ké,
Ẹni tí ń bẹ lójúde ò gbọ́ igbe rẹ̀
Ó ní wọn ó lù ú pa.
Ni wọ́n bá mú ewúrẹ́,
Wọ́n bá lù ú pa.
Awọ rẹ̀ ló ní wọn ó kọ́kọ́ bó.
Wọ́n bó awọ rẹ̀
Èṣù sì ti bá a gbẹ́ igi kan,
Wọ́n bá kan awọ náà mọ́ ọn.
Wọ́n bá ká nǹkan yí etí awọ ọ̀hún yípo;
Wọ́n bá bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí ọbẹ̀ ní sísè.
Wọ́n gúnyán,
Wọ́n rokà,
Wọ́n sì jẹ gbogbo rẹ̀ tán.
Wọ́n mutí,
Wọ́n yó gbári bí itùn
Nígbà tí wọ́n yó fi ní pé
Àwọ́n ṣe gbogbo èyíun nì tán,
Ìlù ti wọ́n sá sóòrùn ti gbẹ níta.

Nígbà tí wọn jẹun tán,
Kí wọn ó máa pé àwọn ń na eékún,
Ni Èṣù bá bọ́ sí ìdí ìlù,
Ó fòpá kan awọ ìdérègbè.
Ẹni tí ń bẹ nírúu Aáwẹ́,
Ẹni tí ń bẹ nírúù Kúta,
Wọn ò dẹtí tí wọ́n fi ń gbọ́.
Ó ní "mo sọ pé òkú ewúrẹ́,
Ó mọ̀ leè ké ju àáyè lọ,
Ẹní irọ́ ni.
Ó ní ṣé ẹ gbọ́ báyìí,
Àbí ẹ ẹ̀ gbọ́"?
Ẹni tó wà ní'Kìrun,
Ibẹ̀ ni wọ́n ti ń jó bọ̀.
Òún ń gbúròó ìlù kan ni.
Èyí ni pé kí oníbèérè yí,
Kó mọ́ pé gbogbo nǹkan tí Ifá bá sọ fún òun,
Kò tètè ṣẹ,
Kó wá ní irọ́ ní Ifá ń pa.
Kò sí nǹkan tí Ifá sọ tí kò jẹ́ òdodo o.
(It was Ọ̀rúnmìlà who told an *àrọ̀*[5] tale,
His own *àrọ̀* tale,
He told his own *àrọ̀* tale easily and splendidly.
He said that he told the *àrọ̀* tale to a point,
That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw on its neck,
(And he traveled a long distance until) he suddenly entered into the abode of Ọlọ́un.
It was the time when Asẹ́ta was going to the city of Adó,
When Ẹ̀rìnmì was going to the city of Ọ̀wọ̀,
And Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself was going to Ìgẹ̀tí hill,
The home of his father.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà told his companions that he saw a strange thing.
They (his companions) said, "Father, the one with *èyọ̀* marks,
What have you seen?"
He said he saw someone, who after building a house,
Did not sleep therein,
But was sleeping outside its walls.
They answered him saying, "You have come again with your tricks.
This must be a great lie.
How can a man build a house,

And sleep outside the walls of his own house?
Does that stand to reason?"
But he (Ọ̀rúnmìlà) insisted that it was not a lie.
He said, "Alright, (if you don't believe it), follow me."
And they followed him.
When he got to a place where wasps built their hive,
He pointed at it,
And said, "Who is the owner of that house?"
They answered, "It is a house of wasps."
He asked, "Where are they now?"
They answered, "Outside their house."
He asked them again, "Are there no rooms inside the house?"
And they answered, "There are."
Then, he said, "Why are they not living inside (the rooms)?"
But (as they could find nothing to say), they started to look at him.
He then said, "That is the person who built a house,
And who is sleeping outside its walls."
They then said they agreed with him.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà said that (once upon a time), he told *àrọ̀* tale;
His own *àrọ̀* tale.
He told his own *àrọ̀* tale easily and splendidly.
He said that he told the *àrọ̀* tale to a point,
That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw on its neck,
(And he traveled a long distance until) he suddenly entered into the abode of Ọlọ́un.
It was the time when Aṣẹ́ta was going to the city of Adó,
When Ẹ̀rìnmì was going to the city of Ọ̀wọ̀,
And Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself was going to Ìgẹ̀tí hill,
The home of his father.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà told his companions that he saw a strange thing.
They (his companions) said, "Father, the one with *ẹ̀yọ̀* marks,
What have you seen?
Have you come up with another trick?"
But Ọ̀rúnmìlà insisted that he saw a strange thing.
They asked him, "What type of strange thing have you seen?"
He said that he saw someone who had a mouth but could not speak.
They said, "You are probably not sure that he has mouth!"
But he insisted that he was sure that he had a mouth
And yet he could not speak.
They said to him, "You have come up with another trick."

They added, "Alright, who is that person who has a mouth but who cannot speak?"
He told them to go and bring a woman.
When they brought her to him,
He commanded them to remove her clothes;
And he touched her private part.
And said, "What is this?"
They answered, "vagina."
He retorted, "Has it no mouth?"
They answered, "It has."
He said, "That is the one who has a mouth but cannot speak."
They all said that they agreed with him.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà said that (once upon a time) he told an *àrọ̀* tale;
His own *àrọ̀* tale.
He told his own *àrọ̀* tale easily and splendidly.
He said that he told the *àrọ̀* tale to a point,
That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw on its neck,
(And he traveled a long distance until) he suddenly entered into the abode of Ọlọ́un.
It was the time when Aṣẹ́ta was going to the city of Adó,
When Ẹ̀rìnmì was going to the city of Ọ̀wọ̀,
And Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself was going to Ìgẹ̀tí hill,
The home of his father.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà told his companions that he saw a strange thing.
What strange thing have you seen this time?
These your lies,
Are they not a strange menace?
"What strange thing have you seen this time?"
He (Ọ̀rúnmìlà) insisted that he saw another strange thing.
He said that a dead dog,
Could eat more *ẹ̀kọ*[6] than a living one.
They all burst into laughter for a long time,
They said, "You have really come up with a good joke.
But this one will be very difficult for you to resolve.
You say that a dead dog can eat more *ẹ̀kọ* than a living one?
How that can be possible,
You will make us see?"
Then he asked them to go and bring one big dog;
And get ready one basket full of lumps of *ẹ̀kọ*.
They took the dog,

And the basket full of lumps of corn paste *ẹ̀kọ* to him.
The dog had not eaten for three days.
They started to give lumps of corn paste *ẹ̀kọ* to the dog.
The dog ate the first lump, and the second one,
But before it could swallow the third lump,
It stretched out its neck in great difficulty.
The dog could not eat any more.
He (Ọ̀rúnmìlà) then asked them to get hold of a club,
And beat the dog to death.
They brought out the club and beat the dog to death.
They said, "Now, how it will be able to eat more lumps of *ẹ̀kọ*,
Today, you will see your lies."
After killing the dog,
He (Ọ̀rúnmìlà) asked them to burn off its hair.
They burnt it,
And they washed its carcasses.
He procured one jar full of palm-oil.
They washed the cooking pot,
Cut the dog into large pieces,
And cooked it.
In time, it became well-cooked,
After it had received constant firing.
They prepared *iyán*,[7]
They prepared *ọ̀kà*,[8]
And procured about three baskets full of lumps of *ẹ̀kọ*.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà then hailed on them saying, "my friends,
It is time,
Don't waste time."
They ate the first basket of *ẹ̀kọ*,
With dog meat.
They ate the second basket of *ẹ̀kọ*,
And they ate the third one as well.
They also finished *iyán*,
Yet they were still looking about the house eagerly,
For more food.
He (Ọ̀rúnmìlà) said, "when I told you that a dead
dog can eat more *ẹ̀kọ* than a living one,
You said it is a lie.
All the food prepared,
Where is it?"
They all shouted together in a loud voice.

Saying that they agreed with him.
They said that he was right.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà said that (once upon a time) he told an *àrọ̀* tale;
His own *àrọ̀* tale.
He told his own *àrọ̀* tale easily and splendidly.
He said that he told the *àrọ̀* tale to a point,
That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw on its neck,
(And he traveled a long distance until) he suddenly entered into the abode of Ọlọ́un.
It was the time when Aséta was going to the city of Adó,
When Ẹ̀rìnmì was going to the city of Ọ̀wọ̀,
And Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself was going to Ìgbẹ́tí hill,
The home of his father.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà told his companions that he saw a strange thing.
They (his companions) said, "Father, the one with *èyọ̀* marks,
What have you seen?
What is it?
What strange thing have you seen again?"
He said, "A dead goat,
Can certainly cry louder than a living one."
And they said, "A dead goat!
How can a dead goat ever cry?"
They said, "You have come up with yet another trick."
He asked them to go and bring a goat.
They beat it properly with a club.
They beat it continuously,
And it cried and cried,
But a man standing outside the house could hardly hear half of its cries.
He asked them to beat it to death.
They then got hold of the goat,
And beat it to death.
The first thing he asked them to do was to remove its skin.
They removed the skin.
Èṣù helped him prepared a piece of carved wood (on which they fixed the goat's skin),
They nailed small wooden pegs round the goat's skin;
They started to cook the meat.
They prepared *iyán*,
They prepared *ọkà*,

They ate everything.
They drank beer,
And became quite satisfied.
By the time they finished
Doing all those things,
The drum placed outside the house had become dry.
When they finished eating,
And as they were resting their stomach after the good meal,
Èṣù went to the drum,
And applied drumstick to it.
People who were as far away as Aáwẹ́,
And those as far away as Kúta,
Did not have to listen before they heard the drum.
He said, "When I told you that a dead goat,
Can cry louder than a living one,
You said that it was a lie.
Do you hear (the drum) now,
Or don't you hear?"
People as far away as Ìkìrun,
Started from there dancing to the drum.
Saying that they heard a strange drum.
This story is for this client,
So that he may not say that all the things that Ifá predicts for him or her,
Do not come to pass quickly,
And therefore say that they are all lies.
There is nothing which Ifá says which is not true.)[9]

Text 4–7: Ifá-Based Prosaic-Poetic Combination Tale-Riddles[10]

A Builder that Lives Outside the Wall of His House

My Children, lump is the bone in a pounded yam; maize cob is the bone of the corn; to be trustworthy is the bone of truth. It is Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the father of Akẹ̀yọ̀, in the course of our conversation who said:

I decode my puzzle,
The puzzle that I'm able to decode sharply;
The puzzle that I decoded for long with exaggeration.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà said: "I saw an incredible thing"!
"What was it that you saw, Ọ̀rúnmìlà?" People around him asked.
"I saw someone who would not sleep in the house he built. He sleeps at the backyard."
People laughed and said: "Ọ̀rúnmìlà, you have come with your fable tales again!"

Your friend made a jocular comment; you in turn killed a crab. That friend responded that he emptied the river and killed a large rat. You said you scraped the grass field and killed a fish. "You are a liar, Ọ̀rúnmìlà!" No one could be so stupid as not to know the place where we put food into. Ọ̀rúnmìlà retorted and said,

I am not lying.
Have you ever found my words to be untrue?
A lie is not a garment that I can wear.
A lie is not shoes that can adorn my feet.
A lie is not a cap that can fit my head.
It is a hasty person that tells lies.
It is a liar that takes a short cut route.
One that takes a short cut route lands in shame and reproach.
Tell-a-lie-to-be-famous, its aftermath is huge disgrace.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà then asked them to follow him. They all came together to go with him. They came out in their large numbers like the wild grass that filled the field. They trekked a long distance until they got to the house of a Human Being. The people said: "Ọ̀rúnmìlà, this is the house of a Human Being. He built the house himself and we all saw him sleeping inside when we came."

Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked them to move forward. They proceeded on this journey for a long time until they got to the house of Rat. The people again said:

Ọ̀rúnmìlà,
We got to the house of a Human Being,
The Human Being built a house,
And s/he sleeps inside;
S/he did not sleep at the backyard.
Now, this is the house of a Rat,
The Rat built this house,
And sleeps inside the house;

The Rat did not sleep at the backyard.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà, once again, said that they should move on. They proceeded on this journey for a long time until they got to the house of Bird. The people retorted again:

Ọ̀rúnmìlà,
We got to the house of a Human Being,
The Human Being built a house,
S/he sleeps inside the house.
S/he did not sleep at the backyard.
We got to the house of the Rat,
The Rat built a house,
And sleeps inside it,
The Rat did not sleep at the backyard.
Now, this is the house of a Bird,
The Bird built a house,
The Bird sleeps inside it.
The Bird did not sleep at the backyard!

Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked them to move forward. They proceeded on this journey for a long time until they got to the house of the Bee. They also had a stopover in the territory of the small Black Ants. They branched off to the abode of the fishes. They went through the provinces and public thoroughfares. They went through the suburbs and suburban. They went through all the nooks and crannies. They were unable to find a creature of God that built a house and is unable to sleep in it but prefers to sleep at its backyard. Ọ̀rúnmìla, then pointed straight forwardly and ask the questions: "who owns this house?" The people replied and said, "It belongs to Wasp." Where is Wasp right now? Ọ̀rúnmìlà queried. They said, "It is at the back of its house." He asked, "Is there no room within?" "There is!" they responded. "Why is the Wasp not living within the house but at the backyard?" Ọ̀rúnmìlà said, "the One who built a house and refuses to live inside it but, instead, sleeps at the backyard is this!"

My Children! Experience is maturity. If one stretches, one would be lifted. A journey increases one's horizon. If you have never experienced something, please do not say there is nothing like it. A person that lives in the village will have the ingenuity of the village. A person that abides in the farmhouse will be conversant with the wisdom of the farmhouse. A person born in the house of wisdom, and raised in the house of the wise, will they not be endowed in wisdom and enriched in knowledge?

Now you see that he who has the coconut is also the owner of the fluid in it. Ọ́rúnmìlà is the custodian of wisdom! Practical common sense belongs to him. He is wrapped up and enriched in knowledge. Sequel to this, he is knowledgeable about the happenings of the earth as well in the heavens. The people then agreed that Ọ̀rúnmìlà is indeed the Superior!

The One Who Has a Mouth but Who Cannot Talk

My Children, lump is the bone of pounded yam; maize cob is the bone of the corn; to be trustworthy is the bone of truth. Ọ́rúnmìlà said,

My puzzle,
The puzzle that I'm able to decode,
The puzzle that I decode,
That I snap the limb of the dog,
I snap the innermost part of the dove,
I snap the house of God.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà said he has again observed one thing! The people asked Akèyọ̀ (Ọ̀rúnmìlà) what he had seen this time. Ọ́rúnmìlà said:

I have indeed traveled far!
I have been to the town of Òsoroǹgíro.
I have been to the North.
I have conversed with people in the South.
I have traversed extensively across the Berth of Àwúsí.
I have made a long trip to Ìdòròmù Àwúsẹ̀.
In the course of my travels,
I have seen a creature that has a mouth but cannot speak!

The people looked up and were in deep thought. They thought about it back and forth, and they came to the conclusion that there is definitely no creature that has a mouth but who cannot talk!

Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked them to follow him. So, they went on and on, and they arrived at the poultry pen. They saw Hen and her chicks that were playing together. Is it not a true saying that birds of the same feather flock together? As soon as the people were sighted from a distance, the Chicken had started clucking and welcoming them with her series of short low sounds: "coo…coo…coo…coo…coo…coo!" The people

exclaimed, "Ọ̀rúnmìlà! Here we are in the Hen's pen. The Hen has a mouth and it spoke!"

Ọ̀rúnmìlà urged them to move forward. The people proceeded on the journey and they all filed sheepishly behind Ọ̀rúnmìlà as if they were a bunch of blind people with low intelligence. Whom do you think they met again? They met a big Rooster, a buddy to the household of Alárá. This big Rooster welcomed them heartily, crowing: "coco—coco—a—do—do—do!" The people exclaimed yet again: "Ọ̀rúnmìlà! We got to the Hen's pen; we found that the Hen has a mouth and used it to cluck: 'coo—coo—coo—coo—coo—coo!' We also arrived in the house of Rooster and we found that the Cock also has a mouth and has used it to crow: 'coco—coco—a—do—do—do!'"

Ọ̀rúnmìlà urged them to follow him. The people again followed Ọ̀rúnmìlà! They trekked on and on until they got to an intersection where they met a big silky skinned Dog—a bull Dog, fierce in nature! The Dog wagged its tail enthusiastically on seeing them and then started to bark: "woof—woof—woof—woof—woof!" The people exclaimed once again!

"Ọ̀rúnmìlà! We got to the Hen's pen. We found that the Hen has a mouth and it clucked with it: 'coo—coo—coo—coo—coo!' We also came to the big Rooster's pen. We found that the Rooster has a mouth and crowed with it: 'coco—coco—a—do—do—do!' We are now in the Dog's kennel. The healthy looking Dog has a mouth and it barked: 'woof—woof—woof— woof—woof!'"

They proceeded on their journey and met a beautiful woman! Ọ̀rúnmìlà told the woman to remove her wrapper from her waist, which she did. Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked them, "What is this?" The people answered, "It is a vagina!" Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked another questions: "Has it a mouth"? To which the people responded, "It has a mouth." Ọ̀rúnmìlà now pointed and said that: "This is the one that has a mouth but cannot speak! Your inability to cruise far has not enabled you to see a strange thing such as a hunch-back mosquito! A well-traveled person stand to see a massive and gigantic creature." Ọ̀rúnmìlà continued, "It is all well and good! Do you now regard me as your master? I have succeeded in solving this particular mirage. I want you to listen to its aftermath!"

"This vagina that I referred to has once upon a time used its mouth to speak! The story goes like this: There was a certain town situated between Àkúrẹ́ and Onḍó. A priest of Ifá named Oníkoromọ̀bí lived there. This Ifá priest had a promiscuous wife. The woman was such a sexually care-free and wayward person. One day, this old man wanted to embark on a

journey. He called his wife and warned her not to flirt in his absence. The Ifá priest went on this journey and returned safely. When he returned home, he called his wife and said: "My wife, I hope you did not misbehave in my absence?" The wife snapped and said: "This is my vagina. You may direct your questions to it and get your response!" The Ifá priest then conjured some magic, and commanded the vagina to start talking: "You this vagina, speak up now!" He said. The vagina started spilling the beans, and every single sexual escapade of the wife in her husband's absence was revealed that day! The town where the vagina spoke out was then renamed and it is known up till today as Òbótò, (literally, the vagina spoke out!).

The Dead Dog that Consumes more Food than the Living

My Children, lump is the bone in a pounded yam; maize cob is the bone of the corn; to be trustworthy is the bone of truth. It is Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the father of Akẹ̀yọ̀, in the course of our conversation Ọ̀rúnmìlà said:

I decode my puzzle,
The puzzle that I'm able to decode sharply,
The puzzle that I decoded for long with exaggeration,
That I snap the limbs of the dog,
I snap the innermost part of the dove,
I snap the house of God easily.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà said he saw an incredible thing. "What have you seen old one?" The people said. Ọ̀rúnmìlà said: He saw a dead dog who ate more *ẹ̀kọ* than a living one. The people said, "Ọ̀rúnmìlà! This is a monumental fallacy! A dead dog cannot bark; a dead ram cannot hammer; dry leaves that fall into the river are lost forever. This one is beyond you!"

Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked them to bring a dog. He also said they should bring a basket full of *ẹ̀kọ*. They brought it. The dog was famished. The people began to unwrap the *ẹ̀kọ* and gave it to the dog. One after the other they unwrapped the *ẹ̀kọ* and gave to the dog. They kept on feeding the dog until the tenth wrap. The dog began to choke for breath.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà then asked a question. He said, "Do you have a sauce pan ready?" The people said: "The sauce pot is ready." "Will you be kind enough to get me palm oil and chilli pepper?" Ọ̀rúnmìlà pleaded. And, the people answered, "The ingredients are all within our reach." They prepared all the ingredients and condiments. They got hold of the dog, and killed it with a club. The dog died at the instant. The people dissected

the dog and cooked it. They brought out a basket full of *ẹ̀kọ*. The people started eating. They ate three baskets full of *ẹ̀kọ* with the limps of the dog. They used the thigh of the dog to eat six baskets of *ẹ̀kọ*. They ate the chest of the dog and the entire kidney, and ten baskets of *ẹ̀kọ* went with that! This is how several baskets of *ẹ̀kọ* were consumed. The people were yet to eat the head of the dog not to talk of the other parts! The dog stew was still plenty in the pot. The people were now ecstatic. They had more than enough to eat. They began to lick their fingers. The mouth should not have been able to eat again for days considering the amount of the dog meat it had consumed. However, food must be eaten daily irrespective of the consumption of the previous day. The people ate *ẹ̀kọ* and called for *iyán* to be eaten as well. They again prepared themselves to eat *àmàlà*[11] soon after! Ọ̀rúnmìlà exclaimed! "You human beings, did I not tell you that a dead dog could eat more *ẹ̀kọ* than a living one! Are you now convinced?" The people answered: "That is quite true! We give you all the credit. You are a legendary creature!" The Dog bones they were eating and cracking prevented them from talking audibly. They had a mouthful!

The Dead Goat that Cries Louder than the Living

My Children, lump is the bone in a pounded yam; maize cob is the bone of the corn; to be trustworthy is the bone of truth. It is Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the father of Akẹ̀yọ̀, in the course of our conversation Ọ̀rúnmìlà said:

I decode my puzzle,
The puzzle that I'm able to decode sharply.
The puzzle that I decoded for long with exaggeration,
The puzzle that I decode,
That I snap the limb of the dog,
I snap the innermost part of the dove,
I snap the house of God.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà said:
Don't tag me as being comical or strange.
Don't say I've come again with my unusual lore.
Here is yet this folklore.
I'm here with another dossier,
A corpus of poetry is in the open.
Who amongst you can fathom what all this could just possibly mean?
A feeble attempt to explain will earn you a faceoff.
A dead goat cries louder than the living one.

The people exclaimed, "Blimey! You must be kidding; Ọ̀rúnmìlà! We put it to you that a dead goat can no longer cry. But if you are really sure of what you just said, that a dead goat can cry louder than the living one, then we want you to expatiate on that." Ọ̀rúnmìlà told them to prepare a hairy goat from the family of Arídẹ̀gbé. The people did as Ọ̀rúnmìlà had said and got the hairy goat ready. They were asked to kill and dissect the hairy goat of Arídẹ̀gbé family. The hairy goat of Arídẹ̀gbé family was skinned. A wood-carving was erected straight. The skin hide of the hairy goat of Arídẹ̀gbé's family was used to cover the wood-carving. The limb of the goat was then used to prepare vegetable and melon stew. The hind leg was used to cook bean soup. The meat of the goat was steamed in hot chili. Everyone was ecstatic. They had much to eat and drink to their satisfaction. Ọ̀rúnmìlà then made a pronouncement! He called upon his subordinate, Èṣù Ọ̀dàrà. Èṣù took the talking drum and started drumming. The animal hide that was used to cover the drum was slung over the shoulder. It began to echo like human voice, saying:

Lead: *Dandan dandándán dàn.*
Chorus: *Dan dan dán.*
Lead: *Dan dan dan dàndándàndàn.*
Chorus: *Dan dan dán.*
Lead: The goat meat is so delicious.
Chorus: I ate it.
Lead: I ate Ọ̀rúnmìlà's food.
Chorus: I ate it.

This drumbeat echoed and could be heard in places like Aáwẹ̀, Kúta, Ìkìrun, Abọ́mọ̀gbé where kola nuts flourish. As they listened to the beating of the drum, they danced enthusiastically.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà said: "I am vindicated. Did I not tell you that a dead goat could cry louder than a living goat?" And, the people gave kudos to Ọ̀rúnmìlà. They said he is indeed great!

The Blending Burden: Form and Function in Tale-Riddling

Taking nothing for granted, let us begin by establishing (in general and preliminary terms) the basis for treating the above seven texts as generic hybrids of folktale and riddle. As one immediately observes, the first text

opens with the classic generic marker of traditional Yorùbá folktales: *Long, long ago, there was a king in Tortoise's native town.* As narratives, all seven stories report events in temporal sequence. Moreover, the sequentiality of actions implies consequentiality. Again, all seven tale-riddles are crafted in such a way as to move from a state of tension, conflict, and imbalance to resolution; that is, movement from disequilibrium to equilibrium, which is a folktale attribute. Furthermore, the central protagonist in Texts 1 and 2 is Tortoise, the generic hero in the traditional Yorùbá folktale repertoire; Tortoise is a sneaky, cunning trickster who always prevails at the end of the story. In overall compass, then, these are clearly folktales.

Within the tales, however, are enigmatic dialogic routines consisting of problem-solution pairs that are most often called "riddles," but are also referred to in some of the cited texts as "puzzles." Thus the narrators give us at least preliminary authorization to examine the texts in terms of the interactive combination of folktale and riddle. One additional way to shed light on the features of this group of tale-riddles is to contrast it with other types of Yorùbá folktales. First, each of the texts consists of a puzzling question or a statement concerning the status of an object to which the audience is invited to react. The following two examples should suffice.

Text 2

Mo járọ́;
Mo járọ̀ o.
Àrọ̀ mọ̀jàlà!
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, já, já,
Mo jálé owó.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, já, já,
Mo jálé ọmọ.
Àrọ̀ tí mo já, já, já,
Mo jálé Olódùmarè pẹ̀ẹ́;
Níbi Ìjàpá ti ń fọ́nnu pé
òun lè sẹ̀pà méfà dẹgbàafà, kójúmọ́ tó mọ́.
(I have a riddle to be resolved;
And, swiftly the puzzle will be resolved.
What a great puzzle!
In my search for a solution to the puzzle,
I stumbled on a house full of money.
In my search for a solution to the puzzle,

I stumbled on a house full of children.
In my search for a solution to the puzzle,
I stumbled on the house of Olódùmarè;
Where Tortoise was boasting that
he could turn six peanuts into 120,000 cowries before daybreak.

Text 6

Ọ̀rúnmìlà said:
I decode my puzzle.
The puzzle that I'm able to decode sharply.
The puzzle that I decoded for long with exaggeration;
That I snap the limbs of the dog,
I snap the innermost part of the dove,
I snap the house of God easily.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà said he saw an incredible thing. "What have you seen old one?"
The people said that *Ọ̀rúnmìlà said: He saw a dead dog who ate more ẹ̀kọ than a living one.*

★ ★ ★

Clearly, these are not classic "true riddles," which are defined as "enigmatic questions in the form of descriptions whose referent must be guessed" (Abrahams and Dundes, 1972: 130). To be sure, they do not have certain standard riddle elements. Yet they are enigmatic, which is to say they require special interpretive work, and while, grammatically speaking, they are not interrogative, they do have the illocutionary forces of questions.

One finds puzzling elements in each of the above excerpts. For example, how could Tortoise, a sneaky reptile known only for craftiness rather than acumen, exchange six peanuts (costing approximately two cowries) for 120,000 cowries overnight? In addition, how could a dead dog possibly consume more food than the living? Audience members thus speculate how these statements might be plausible. However intently they attempt to find answers, listeners are still left with substantial doubts. Thus the puzzled listeners, in their impatience, verbalize total disagreement with the claims made, forcing the proponent of the riddle to solve the puzzle him/herself. This narrative technique makes tale-riddle performance quite unlike the regular riddles, usually characterized by a

question and answer session. Nor is it like the Yorùbá folktale proper, the opening gambit of which only solicits the listeners' permission to narrate. The inductive narrative device of this group of tales can be contrasted with the African arithmetical-dilemma tales, characterized by the narrator asking such questions as: "How can four women sit on three chairs without any of them sharing a seat?" The narrator solves questions such as this one by arithmetical process.[12]

One other feature that distinguishes Yorùbá tale-riddles from other types of narrative forms is their plot structure. This class of narratives, according to Bádé Àjùwọ̀n (1986),

> shares in part the characteristics of the parable whose surface meaning intensifies the strength of its real meaning by the use of metaphorical language …the genre shares with the Yorùbá folktale-proper the special functions of entertainment and of moral aetiological education. At the same time, its uniqueness arises from the chainlike episodic structure, the incremental repetitive form …and the non-utilization of songs and refrains as performance techniques. (69)

The Yorùbá tale-riddle consists of a chain of episodic events, running up to six, eight, and sometimes ten events, with one event starting where the other ends. These episodes may be punctuated occasionally by the listeners' verbalized doubts on the claims made in the episodes, or by the narrator's own statement that cues the subsequent episodic narrative. As audience members cast doubt upon the claims made, they also call the leader/narrator various names such as "liar" or "joker." The magnanimity with which the narrator reacts to these names shows the significance of the genre as an instrument of entertainment. Rather than take offense, the narrator often bursts into laughter and immediately begins to recite the puzzling tale, at the end of which comes the solution that often begins from a small premise in the initial episodic story. As the story progresses, extraneous details emerge in subsequent episodes, often suggesting further complexities with which the listeners have to cope. This type of episodic structure gives tale-riddles a distinctive personality, but the structure is not the only stylistic feature that ensures the beauty and quality of this group of folk narratives.

Incremental repetition also contributes greatly to the oratory of most Yorùbá tale-riddle narrators. Apart from the episodic puzzle at the beginning of the tale, usually a few lines of ideas or facts are repeated, referencing content found in the tale-riddle immediately preceding.

This creative strategy often serves as a useful addition in advancing the course of the story. With progressive additions, listeners are usually provided sufficient case-facts to persuade them to accept the narrator's solution at the end of the rendition. For example, Text 2, entitled "How Tortoise Exchanged Six Peanuts for 120,000 Cowries," reveals the following incremental repetition in the number of characters in the story:

Episode 1: Opening gambit alerting the audience that the text is a tale-riddle.
Episode 2: Tortoise and his prospective mother-in-law (two characters).
Episode 2: Tortoise, his mother-in-law, and Squirrel (three characters).
Episode 3: Tortoise, his mother-in-law, Squirrel, and Bush-Fowl (four characters).
Episode 4: Tortoise, his mother-in-law, Squirrel, Bush-Fowl, and Elephant (five characters).
Episode 5: Tortoise, his mother-in-law, Squirrel, Bush-Fowl, Elephant, and Nursing-mother (six characters).
Episode 6: Tortoise, his mother-in-law, Squirrel, Bush-Fowl, Elephant, Nursing-mother, and Palm-tapper (seven characters).
Episode 7: Tortoise, his mother-in-law, Squirrel, Bush-Fowl, Elephant, Nursing-mother, Palm-tapper, and the Queen (eight characters).
Episode 8: Conclusion and resolution of the riddle.

This does not imply that incremental repetition as a technical and creative device of oral literature distinguishes tale-riddles from all other forms of Yorùbá narratives; however, the use of incremental repetition *is* more pronounced in tale-riddles. Listeners often take great interest in this type of repetition, paying particular attention to the narrator's accuracy in recounting the tale and, in doing so, are drawn into the performance.

At this point, the reader may be curious concerning mnemonic devices that narrators employ to remember such long passages of text. Also of interest may be certain elements contained in the text promoting listener enjoyment and lending lucidity to the narrator's performance. While it is true that narrators of tale-riddles depend heavily on memorization for a successful performance, they do not deliver entirely rote renditions of texts to which nothing has been added or from which nothing has been deleted. What then are the specific tools that assist narrators in carrying out laudatory performances, reciting texts that would certainly tax one's memory?

First, tale-riddles contain a number of traditional formulae, motifs, and culture-bound traits with which the narrator (and members of the audience) are highly familiar, and which the narrator easily accesses during performance. Furthermore, mammals, insects, reptiles, and birds often represent three-quarters of the characters in folktales and, most often, the narrator is exceedingly familiar with each. Small yet wily animals are popular, including tortoise, squirrel, bush-fowl, hare, wasp, and spider. Larger animals like elephant, goat, dog, and leopard also figure prominently. On occasion, human characters are presented, such as king, queen, nursing-mother, palm-tapper, and the marvelous old woman. The appearance of the old woman especially infuses the narrative performance with great excitement and wonder.

Highly familiar with these characters, most narrators are remarkably adept at recalling and mimicking cries, songs, and peculiar lifestyles in ways that significantly enhance tale-telling sessions. Finally, the narrator's knowledge of regional geographic features, such as the location of specific trees, rivers, hills, or forest reserves, symbolically referred to in several tale-riddles, is of considerable value. These environmental markers hold particular cultural and economic relevance for the narrator whose personal life may have been spent on a farm or in agricultural contexts. Firsthand experience with these locales makes them easy for a narrator to recall. Thus, s/he is dealing with a "research bank" containing countless records of cultural and environmental histories, from which apropos material is selected. As Melville Herskovits and Frances Herskovits (1958) rightly argues, "the world of the story-teller is largely defined by his culture, and in composing his tale, whatever its form or length, he draws on the world he knows whether as reality or fantasy (or one in which tradition has fused both) for setting, plot, characterization, and the sanctions that give these meanings" (70).

It is also important to examine, albeit briefly, the folklore of tale-riddles, characteristics of which further distinguish this group of tales from other related Yorùbá folk narratives. The universe of riddle-narratives is populated—to the absolute exclusion of fairies, ghosts, ogres, and witches—by large and small forest animals, birds of different species, various insects, familiar environmental objects and, of course, by human beings. All inhabit the same milieu. Rather than an "other worldly" setting, it is the human sphere in which events transpire. Animal characters as well as inanimate objects are described in material and human terms/form. They engage in trade with humans, dance, intermarry, socialize, dine, quarrel, and even communicate with them. This is why Rose Gecau (1970) claimed that "they are the 'other folk' of the country-side

who walk along the same paths, share similar vicissitudes with humans upon equal terms and in the crystalline of life's tale, are (at times), credited with some of the equivalent idealized traits of popular character" (27).

One appreciates the fact that what cannot be achieved realistically may be manifested through fantasy—in all narrative forms. Indeed, the ways and manners in which wondrous events occur in tale-riddles deserve attention. Rather than attaining marvelous outcomes with the aid of fantastical devices and phantasmagoric creatures such as fairies, ogres, and witches, as in the Yorùbá folktale-proper, amazing events are often achieved in riddle-narratives through ambiguity and puzzles. Occasionally, however, one does encounter characters with extraordinary abilities, such as palm-tapper and nursing-mother (see Text 2). Both of these characters inevitably behave in unexpected, surprising ways. The palm-tapper, for instance, often climbs palm trees with his legs pointed upward and his head pointed downward, while the nursing-mother is frequently portrayed with a baby on her back, with the little infant legs pointing up and the head pointing down. Their behaviors are so fantastical that narrators may ascribe these two characters additional "mysterious" powers, such as the ability to walk on their heads, eat through their noses, or breathe through their ears.

Of all devices used to amplify entertainment in tale-riddle sessions, dramatization is the most effective. One may argue that, as a performance technique, dramatization is not peculiar to this subgenre of folktales. However, of all forms of Yorùbá folktales types, tale-riddles make the most *frequent* use of dramatization. This is because, even among audience members (at a tale-riddling session) who are familiar with most of the characters, there are individuals who may not have noticed the true and full significance of such characters until a gifted narrator dramatizes their roles. The narrator consequently mimics the behaviors and mannerisms of the tale characters, presenting different shapes, situations, and moods while jumping, laughing, weeping, dancing, whistling, clapping, and pointing in various directions during the performance. Such masterful dramatization clearly reveals each character's role in the story, and provides necessary points of reference for, as well as interaction with, the audience.

Apart from their entertainment value, folktales in general serve as a powerful vehicle for conveying moral messages to audience members, especially to children. This primary objective has contributed immensely to the longevity of tales and to their utility as effective educational tools. One cannot emphasize strongly enough the following fact: masterful

storytelling sharpens a child's intellectual faculties and may guide young people toward becoming responsible members of society.

The inherent value of folktales, now and in the past, is that they offer an ideal format for providing moral, ethical, and cultural information to young people about the world in which they live. It is no surprise, then, that tales retain significant status in the realm of storytelling in African societies. In precolonial Yorùbá, storytelling events would have been especially important occasions—opportunities to instill children with appropriate sociocultural attitudes and ethics, imparting lessons never formally taught at home or at school. The type of moral education to which I refer not only relates to cultural norms, but also includes behavioral standards that have been collectively approved by a given community or society.

The essence of the Yorùbá folktale, then, is to shape a child's understanding of the realities of life and to assist in character building. Themes are selected that focus on the cardinal virtues of a righteous life. However, to focus exclusively on this primary function of folktales is to weaken one's understanding of the full significance of this class of narratives. As Karin Barber (1991) observes, "the important point is not so much that the *àlọ́* (folktales) are didactic, imparting values to the young…but that the ground and framework of every story is the value of everyday, ordinary, human world. What is tested, experimented with and sometimes imaginatively abolished is the morality of communal living, based on common decency, humanity and generosity. This is the scope and the field of the discourse of *àlọ́*—folktales" (16).

The ambivalence, or what Robert Pelton (1980) calls the ambiguity, of tale-riddles makes for an interesting investigation of the audience's role in this genre. When a given genre possesses a double or dual disposition—one for disruption and the other for order—focusing on one aspect of this duality, or the interchange between them, is likely to elicit different responses from the audience. Correspondingly, it can be argued that the class of Yorùbá narratives identified as tale-riddles deserves two types of aesthetic profiling: negation and affirmation. Storytellers are predisposed by this "ambivalence" to organize their images according to the types of aesthetic response they want to elicit. Understanding the rich dynamics of tale-riddle discourse, especially the specific aesthetic transaction between narrator and participants, may be achieved by dividing the narrative mode into two different types of tales (briefly alluded to earlier in this chapter) that are commonly found in Yorùbá communities today: the non-Ifá-based tale-riddles of negation and the Ifá-based tale-riddles of affirmation.

Other than their aesthetic functions, the non-Ifá based tale-riddles of negation serve as the medium of social criticism. Narrators of this type of tale-riddle take their messages directly to the common people, encouraging them to rise up against tyrants, insist on their basic rights, and denounce corrupt leadership. Therefore, these tale-riddle compositions are generally classified as protest and resistance texts and their targets are usually the élite ruling class—members of which may be responsible for perpetuating graft and corruption. Among all the Yorùbá narrative tales, these resistance texts are specifically created to challenge the status quo, or to question accepted traditions and customs inimical to the people's welfare.

One may argue, therefore, that what is being negated in the story in Text 1, in which Tortoise marries three princesses in a single day, is class domination. The king and his daughters exemplify indifference and snobbishness, both of which Tortoise sets out to undo. Blinded by the luxury of palace life, the king and his daughters fail to imagine that a marginal citizen like Tortoise might possess keen insight and intelligence or, at the very least, be able to access private information about influential and powerful officials. Tortoise's metamorphic potential is, however, enhanced by a sense of class solidarity between him and the Woodpecker, as the former's intellectual curiosity is rewarded by the latter's divulgence of the names of his erstwhile oppressors. The tale's concern for social change is underscored by Tortoise's threat to expose the palace's corruption and by his final rejection of the king's attempted bribe (offering to give Tortoise a house). Resisting bribery illustrates the sincerity of Tortoise's resistance to subjugation and refusal to compromise his integrity. By ordering the three princesses to move to his hut and embrace the society they once derided, Tortoise signals determination to make the hegemony attend to his views. Tortoise's success in twisting the rules originally designed to exclude him socially, using them instead to remove the class barrier (between the king and princesses on the one hand and Woodpecker and Tortoise on the other), elicits the audience's full support and sympathy.

Similarly, the metacritical focus of the poetic tale-riddle of Text 2 entitled "How Tortoise Exchanged Six Peanuts for 120,000 Cowries" juxtaposes images of power and domination with those of powerlessness and resistance. The first of such juxtaposed images is the demand for an exorbitant dowry from Tortoise by Yánníbo's mother, a well-placed trader; in response, Tortoise requests a reduction based on his need to prepare materially for marital obligations. Another example is the attempt of Yánníbo's mother to humiliate Tortoise in front of his

fiancée; this is juxtaposed with Tortoise's attempt to belittle the arrogant woman with promises to achieve overnight what she accomplishes in one year. The juxtaposition of images of preexisting advantage with that of challenge and inversion of such relations is illustrated in the chain of tricks in the story. Each community member that Tortoise subsequently tries to trick is more wealthy and influential than the one before. The final juxtaposition of Palm-tapper and the Queen illustrates that the underdog's traditional target of attack is always an individual in an extremely powerful position. An affluent Queen like Yánníbo's wealthy mother is made to pay the 120,000 cowries, the sum on which Tortoise's marriage hinges.

The tale-riddles of affirmation, on the other hand, are Ifá-based stories that put didactic pressure, subtle or otherwise, on the audience to conform to certain religious, social, or moral values. Such tales, in pragmatic terms, aspire to socialize the audience—guiding them to what is "officially" considered to be the correct mode of action, thought, and behavior in the social world of storyteller and audience. This kind of socialization is what Jacques Ellul (1973) and Kack Zipes (1983), in different contexts, refer to as integrational propaganda, or attempts made by cultural teachers in both primary socialization strategy—such as the overt teaching of norms in family settings—and secondary socialization strategy, such as focusing on a preferred norm or thought or action in a fictional setting. We will, for purposes of thoroughness, clarity, and space, bundle the stories in Texts 3–7 together in the following discussion. These tales will be analyzed briefly, first in relation to the primary aesthetic functions that storytellers emphasize and later, in relation to the secondary aesthetic process that storytellers attempt to deemphasize.

Texts 3 and 4–7 consist of four riddle-narratives each with similar themes: the tale of a homebuilder or homeowner who lives outside rather than inside the structure, the tale of the individual who has a mouth but cannot talk, the tale of a dead dog that consumes more food than the living, and the tale of a dead goat that cries louder than the living. These tale-riddles serve multiple functions. First, they keep audiences mentally alert, since the tale-riddles are used as "fillers" in between lengthy storytelling sessions. Second, the tale-riddles challenge audience members' intellect and wit. In short, the audience is expected to display imaginative powers and exercise keen memory when considering possible solutions to the riddles. Third, the tale-riddles are simply entertaining. For instance, hearty laughter often follows the irreconcilability of each of the riddles. Finally, the tale-riddles are instructive,

reflecting the social and cultural milieu of the Yorùbá world. Thus, the riddles nurture a sense of belonging to, and a keen awareness of, one's cultural identity.

However, what deserves further scrutiny is the secondary aesthetic process, through which storytellers attempt to deemphasize the real purpose of the four riddle-narratives by (in my opinion) asserting the authority of Ọ́rúnmìlà as an advisor, counselor, therapist, physician, pharmacist, and religious priest who knows *all* things and solves *all* human problems. Because traditional Yorùbá society is predominantly nonliterate, the people integrate taboos, myths, and religious beliefs in their oral literature. During this process of integration, deep-rooted prejudices and beliefs are passed on to the general population, thereby influencing attitudes toward certain aspects of Yorùbá life. For one to fully comprehend this phenomenon, background information on the place of Ifá in the Yorùbá world must be provided.

Ifá is at the center of Yorùbá tradition and all aspects of this mytho-aesthetic canon are organized to explain the nature of human life. Attending to multiple life challenges is accomplished through a divination system believed capable of offering answers to *all* human problems. Existing scholarship on this mythology owes much to the efforts of William Bascom (1969) and Wándé Abímbọ́lá (1975) who have produced the most comprehensive and illuminative collections of Ifá divination poetry to date. Abímbọ́lá (1975) describes Ifá as "the Yorùbá god of wisdom, knowledge, and divination," who occupies a "premier position among Yorùbá divinities" (3). He argues further that Ifá's supreme status is derived from his vast knowledge and wisdom. Ifá divination is marked by a series of chants (known as *ẹsẹ ifá*) from specific chapters of Ifá poetry referred to as *odù ifá*.

Ẹsẹ ifá verses can be treated as verbal art and as a storehouse of information about Yorùbá mythology and cosmology. The aesthetic value or merit of this poetic form, however, is, to the Yorùbá, secondary to its religious significance. While the Yorùbá worldview can be reconstructed from information contained in the verses, some evidence of Yorùbá culture is also found in varying degrees in other oral genres. In these other genres, allusions are usually made to elements of Yorùbá culture, while in *ẹsẹ ifá* emphasis is placed on theological and ritual threads running through the verses. Indeed, in *ẹsẹ ifá* the origins and validation of the culture are codified. As Bascom (1969) has noted, "the verses embody myths recounting the activities of the deities and justifying details of ritual, and they are often cited to settle a disputed point of theology or ritual" (11–12). Abímbọ́lá (1975) underlines the point that *ẹsẹ ifá* constitutes a compendium of information on Yorùbá worldview, when he writes that

"Ifá literary corpus is…the storehouse of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Even [to this day] Ifá is recognized by the Yorùbá as a repository for a traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore" (32).

The corpus of Ifá is multigeneric, including a wide spectrum of forms such as anecdotes, witticisms, dilemma poems, and tales. These genres are interconnected in that they all reflect patterns of conflict and resolution through sacrifice. *Ẹsẹ ifá* verses contain statements of human problems, wishes, and desires, and a testimony of how these problems have been addressed in the past. Some stated desires represent universal human needs while others are Yorùbá specific. The statistics below, provided by Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1984: 120), highlight how frequently these stated desires occur. According to him, of the 128 *ẹsẹ ifá* in Wándé Abímbọ́lá (1968), 27 deal with a desire to bear children, 20 with victory over enemies who pose mortal threat, 18 with specific attempts to escape death, and 33 with the hope for blessings. Of the 186 *ẹsẹ ifá* notated in Bascom (1969), 36 relate to the theme of death, 28 involve the desire for children, 24 address the need for a wife, and so on. From these statistics, one can begin to appreciate Yorùbá values, including conditions both desired and dreaded.

Emerging from this Ifá complex are certain aesthetic phenomena, including its utility in solving everyday human problems. In actual divination, the Ifá priest continues chanting until the client identifies the verse that most closely relates to her or his problem. Whatever sacrifices are contained in that specific verse will be the same sacrifices prescribed by the priest for the client. Aesthetic currents still play out even in the context of sacred ritual divination as priest and client work together in drawing meanings from the stock of Ifá poetry.

In Text 3, for example, although the title alludes to the hidden aesthetics in the tale-riddles with our choice of the caption "Ifá Told Four Tale-Riddles in Odù Ogbèwẹ̀yìn," the real purpose of the tales, as revealed in the concluding part of the text, is to affirm Ifá's incontrovertible ability to solve human problems:

> This story is for this client
> So that he may not say that all the things that Ifá predicts for him/her
> Do not come to pass quickly,
> And therefore say that they are all lies.
> There is nothing which Ifá says which is not true.[13]

A similar point is made in the concluding part of Text 4:

> My children! Experience is maturity…Now you see that…Ọ́rúnmìlà is the custodian of wisdom! Practical common sense belongs to him. He is wrapped up and enriched in knowledge. Sequel to this, he is knowledgeable about the happenings of the earth as well as the heavens. The people then agreed that Ọ̀rúnmìlà is indeed the Superior!

In all ages, in all civilizations, and in all cultures, human beings have generally had recourse to one form of divination or another when making decisions regarding practical, and often critical, matters—especially when in doubt as to possible consequences of various strategic actions. The belief that underlies the divinatory institution and practice is that human destiny or fate is by no means haphazard; rather, it is part of a wider cosmic pattern that can be deciphered by inductive, interpretive or intuitive methods adopted by the accomplished diviner whose technique is considered mystical or other-than-mundane. A kind of legitimization is consequently attached to the recommended line of action or decision, a legitimization that allows the client greater confidence and ease and, therefore, greater chances of success. Hesitancy or half-heartedness serves little purpose toward achievement of one's goals, and pales in comparison to the single-mindedness afforded to clients by a respected diviner's recommendations.

In summary, then, one may argue that the riddle meets narrative criteria in three ways. First, it is merely presented as a riddle, inserted into the narrative action as a puzzling statement, preserving its full formal integrity. Second, the narrator offers explication, recounting sequential actions for which s/he has laid the requisite groundwork (a storytelling sequence that seems to contradict descriptive elements associated with those actions). Finally, after the participants' failure to guess the answer or solution, the storyteller disassembles the riddle with its referent-cum-explication. The interactional structure of the riddle encounter, then, spans the entire tale—from the initial posing of the riddle to the audience's unsuccessful attempt to guess the correct solution to the storyteller's revelation and explanation of the enigmatic answer.

The Basis of Blending Genres

Now that we have closely examined sample texts, discovering how riddles and other enigmatic questioning routines are integrated within folktales,

the question arises: what might this analysis suggest in more general terms about the resultant blending? Stated differently, what might be the grounds for suggesting that tale-riddles constitute a secondary genre in Bakhtin's (1986) terms? While seven texts cannot constitute a comprehensive basis upon which to designate generic conventions, they can begin to help us identify some of the lines along which further analytic and comparative work might be fruitfully pursued.

To begin with, these texts suggest some of the motivations for blending folktales with riddles and other enigmatic interrogative routines. The first salient point, acknowledging the value of enigmatic routines as an expressive folktale resource, is that such routines highlight, intensify, and formalize interactional skill and the cleverness underlying such skill. As has been noted, the ability to create a seemingly "unanswerable" enigma, as well as the ability to solve the same seemingly "unanswerable" enigma, both represent displays of interactional skill and are thus exercises of interactional power. For instance, given the thematic prominence in Texts 1 and 2 (that is, the triumph of Tortoise), the lowly hero and his accession to eminent status in the face of resistance by those of higher power and status come as no surprise. Riddles and related forms offer themselves as perfect mechanisms for effecting such transformations.

Moreover, they offer a contrast to institutionally grounded power—the counter-position of institutional and interactional power providing the tension that drives the tale. However, riddles and related enigmatic forms rest centrally on transformative tropes, such as metaphor, metonymy, personification, inversion, punning, and the like. These devices disguise or conceal the referents of the routines and adeptly obscure the relationship between appearance and reality. Furthermore, the enigmatic routines themselves may be functionally transformed in the course of the narrative, as in Text 3, where one observes the four-in-one narratives as more riddle-like than initially intended, while accounting for the secondary aesthetics therein. Thus, the enigmatic routines provide an effective symbolic correlative to basic thematic business in the folktales. As these routines serve to transform the status quo while disassembling the relationship between appearance and reality, their various functions merge. At this point, the protagonist at last embodies the enigma and the contest of interactional power reaches a climax, resulting in a full integration of the enigmatic routine and folktale.

Given the functional compatibility of the riddle and folktale, in terms of the ways in which riddles lend themselves to the fulfillment of significant thematic and plot conventions, how is the blending of the genres accomplished in formal terms? The narratives thus far examined evince

a range of possibilities for narrativization of the riddle. At the most basic level, the dialogic problem-solution or question-answer structure that constitutes the core of the riddle is inherently sequential and thus lends itself naturally to narrative. A simple recounting of the question-and-answer or problem-and-solution riddle exchange constitutes a minimal narrative in its own right. The core structure, of course, may be elaborated on by narrating additional constituent acts of the riddling encounter, such as unsuccessful guesses followed by provision and explication of the answer by the poser of the enigma, and so on (as exemplified in the stories in Texts 3 and 4–7, in particular).

As previously implied, the narrative (vis-à-vis interactional sequence) of a riddling encounter may be further extended through repetition, by multiplying the number of riddling exchanges, adding up to four episodes as in Text 5, five episodes as in Text 4, or even eight episodes as in Text 2. It should be noted here, also, that the recounting of the riddling interaction may be subject to further transformation by the storyteller. A case in point is the compression of narrated events in Text 2, for example. Between sunset and sunrise, the enigma is initially posed and the answer and explication are provided, all this in eight episodes. Even in this compressed narrative, however, the interactional nature of the riddling remains a key element in the construction of the overall storytelling.

Returning full circle, let us once again address the core question. In generic terms, what is the essential nature of a tale-riddle? Examination of the preceding seven sample texts has provided at least a partial answer: sometimes folktale, sometimes riddle, most frequently a complex fusion of the two. A more in-depth and specific explication of the tale-riddle, along with its definitive features as a secondary genre, will ultimately require further analysis as well as a more comprehensive sampling of texts.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Variability and Function of Song-Riddle

> Midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace, it is metaphor which most produces knowledge.
>
> —Aristotle (348–322 BC)

Songs and singing accompany virtually every social occasion and activity in traditional Yorùbá life. When a child is born, songs frame the moments of rejoicing and merry-making and are an important part of acknowledging the family's good fortune. To calm or comfort young children, mothers (or nannies) sing lullabies to "lull" them to sleep. During ceremonies that signal passage into adolescence (e.g., initiation ceremonies for boys and puberty rites for girls), traditional Yorùbá songs are performed to mark this important transition. When individuals marry, songs celebrate the sacred occasion. These songs range from good-humored taunts (such as suggestions to the young woman or man that s/he is surrendering long-cherished freedom for the "prison" of marriage) to sincere advice (such as supportive ideas providing the young wife information about creating a happy home and successful marriage).

Work songs are another example of the integral role singing plays in traditional Yorùbá culture. Both men and women find relief from long hours of labor on the farm, in the fields, at the fishing traps, or at the weaver's loom. Some songs contain formulae for healing ailments. Others are used to foretell the future. Still others inspire and strengthen hunters and warriors before a perilous encounter, or praise them after they accomplish courageous feats. As with work, so with play: a variety of evening songs are intended to relax young men and women (as well as children)

after a hard day's work. When a man or woman achieves a certain level of success in life, the community awards him or her with a chieftaincy title, during which time specific rejoicing songs are performed. When an individual dies, songs of lamentation play a key role, supporting the grieving process while also offering family members consolation for a life well lived. These songs usher deceased individuals into the glorious company of their ancestors. Ulli Beier (1956) is therefore correct in claiming that daily Yorùbá life "is accompanied by a great deal of impromptu singing, a kind of musical thinking, in which the singer puts everything to a tune, which happens to pass through his head" (23).

These songs are participatory and inclusive; each member of any given community may participate in choral response to the "song leader." The songs inevitably evoke audience response, which may include hand clapping, feet tapping, and/or head shaking accompanied by unconscious body movements dictated by the rhythm of the songs. Some songs are imagistic and witty, containing proverbs, adulations, and supplications. Others are critical and contemptuous. Yorùbá songs are not only deeply rooted in the people's cultural lives, but they also serve as expressive channels of internal and external experience. The themes or concerns of songs are numerous and vary significantly from one occasion to the next. This chapter necessarily narrows the focus to the role of songs in "versified wordplay"—Yorùbá song-riddles known as *àrọ̀*.

The purpose of some Yorùbá enigmatic forms is to create ambiguous statements for participants to decode. Not so with *àrọ̀* song-riddles. The Yorùbá song-riddles have been developed primarily for play, performance, and entertainment. Consequently, multiplicity of meaning, which governs other enigmatic forms, is less visible in *àrọ̀* song-riddles. Nevertheless, one still finds a preponderance of enigmatic dialogic routines consisting of question-answer or problem-solution pairs. The question-answer sequence of *àrọ̀* song-riddles is on the whole fixed. In many cases each song-riddle text is memorized and is generally known to the members of the community where it is performed, so that everybody is able to sing along during the performance. These performances are usually accompanied by clapping of hands or a rhythmic movement of the body from left to right—in accordance with steps that are either culturally familiar or else related to the particular style dictated by the song-riddle. Whatever the case may be, the audience of *àrọ̀* performances is always delighted to seize the opportunity of singing and/or "dancing" to the tune of accompanying music, and generally participating in a relaxed way.

Style and Form in Àrọ̀ Song-Riddles

Two patterns dominate performance of Yorùbá *àrọ̀* song-riddles: the monochoral group performance and antiphonal group performance. Monochoral performance implies that all participants sing the song-riddle text together—from beginning to end. Below is a sample text from a popular monochoral Yorùbá song-riddle:

Text 1

Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ùnpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ùnpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pajá mi o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pajá, pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pẹkùn mi o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá pajáà yí o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pẹkùn, pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀, ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pọdẹ mi o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá pẹkùn yí o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pọdẹ, pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn ko pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pejò mi o, Jẹ́ùnpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá pọdẹ yí o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pejò, pejò.
Ejò kọ̀; ejò kò pọdẹ.

Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pegi mi o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá pejò yí o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pegi, pegi.
Igi kọ̀; igi kò pejò.
Ejò kọ̀; ejò kò pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pená mi o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá jógi yí o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pená, pená.
Iná kọ̀; iná kò jógi.
Igi kọ̀; igi kò pejò.
Ejò kọ̀; ejò kò pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pomi mi o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Kó wá paná yí o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
A pomi, pomi.
Omi kọ̀; omi kò paná.
Iná kọ̀; iná kò jógi.
Igi kọ̀; igi kò pejò.
Ejò kọ̀; ejò kò pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.

Ẹ bá mi poòrùn mi o! Jẹńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹńpẹ.
Kó wá gbẹ omi yí o, Jẹńpẹ.
A poòrùn, poòrùn.
Òòrùn kọ̀; òòrùn kò gbẹ omi.
Omi kọ̀; omi kò paná.
Iná kọ̀; iná kò jógi.
Igi kọ̀, igi kò pejò.
Ejò kọ̀; ejò kò pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹńpẹ.
Jẹńpẹ, Jẹńpẹ o! Jẹńpẹ.
Jẹńpẹ, Jẹńpẹ o! Jẹńpẹ.
Ẹ bá mi pòjò mi o! Jẹńpẹ.
Kó wá ṣe kí ni o? Jẹńpẹ.
Kó wá poòrùn yí o, Jẹńpẹ.
A pòjò, pòjò.
Òjò kọ̀; òjò kò gbẹ oòrùn.
Òòrùn kọ̀; òòrùn kò gbẹ omi.
Omi kọ̀; omi kò paná.
Iná kọ̀; iná kò jógi.
Igi kọ̀; igi kò pejò.
Ejò kọ̀; ejò kò pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀; ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀; ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀; ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ o, Jẹńpẹ.[1]
(Jẹńpẹ, Jẹńpẹ o! Jẹ̀npẹ.
Jẹńpẹ, Jẹńpẹ o! Jẹ̀npẹ.
Summon my dog for me, *Jẹńpẹ.*
What for? *Jẹńpẹ.*
To eat the child's excrement, *Jẹńpẹ.*
We each took turns calling the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹńpẹ.*
Jẹńpẹ, Jẹńpẹ o! Jẹńpẹ.
Jẹńpẹ, Jẹńpẹ o! Jẹńpẹ.
Summon my leopard for me, *Jẹńpẹ.*
What for? *Jẹńpẹ.*
To kill this dog, *Jẹńpẹ.*
We each took turns calling the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.

The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon my hunter for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To kill this leopard, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused, the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon my snake for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To kill this hunter, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon my club for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To kill this snake, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon my fire for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To burn the club, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the fire.
The fire refused; the fire would not burn the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.

The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon my water for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To put out this fire, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the water.
The water refused; the water would not put out the fire.
The fire refused; the fire would not burn the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon the sun for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To dry up this water, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the sun.
The sun refused; the sun would not dry up the water.
The water refused; the water would not put out the fire.
The fire refused; the fire would not burn the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Jẹ́ńpẹ, Jẹ́ńpẹ o! Jẹ́ńpẹ.
Summon the rain for me, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
What for? *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
To drive away the sun, *Jẹ́ńpẹ*.
We each took turns calling the rain.
The rain refused; the rain will not drive away the sun.
The sun refused; the sun would not dry up the water.
The water refused; the water would not put out the fire.
The fire refused; the fire would not burn the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill the hunter.

The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement,
Jẹ́ńpẹ.)

Fewer examples of monochoral performance are found in field data—probably because in traditional Yorùbá oral performance it is rare for a group to sing without initial or periodic prompting lines from a lead singer.

The most popular style of song-riddle is thus the antiphonal group performance. The group may be comprised of two or more persons, but the important element in antiphony is that one party provides a "call" and the other a "response." This may sometimes take the form of "question and answer" or "problem and solution" pairs; more frequently, it is a device allowing performers to take turns in bringing out various sides and aspects of the same subject. One finds a variety of antiphonal arrangements in Yorùbá song-riddles. For example, in one type of arrangement, the call and response are related. The call asks a specific question while the response provides an appropriate answer during the performance, such as the following:

Text 2

LEADER: *Mo ṣí'mọ̀ọ́.*
GROUP: *Ìmọ́lógun.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jógun?*
GROUP: *Ogun lájà.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jájà?*
GROUP: *Àjà n Mọ̀rẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Mọ̀rẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Mọ̀rẹ̀ n'Ípọn.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ipọn?*
GROUP: *Ipọn Olú.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Ólú?*
GROUP: *Olúdóṣù.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Óṣù?*
GROUP: *Oṣù Ọ̀rà.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ọ̀rà?*
GROUP: *Ọ̀rà Ihíe.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ihíe?*
GROUP: *Ihíe kókó.*

LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ kókó?*
GROUP: *Ikókórodò.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ rodò?*
GROUP: *Rodò pẹ̀ẹ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní jẹ́ pẹ̀ẹ́?*
GROUP: *Pẹ̀ẹ́ àbàlà.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ àbàlà?*
GROUP: *Àbàlà onígbó.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ onígbó?*
GROUP: *Onígbóo Kòso.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Kòso?*
GROUP: *Kòso Ejió.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ejió?*
GROUP: *Ejió Ifẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ifẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Ifẹ̀ ẹ̀ẹ̀sún.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ẹ̀ẹ̀sún?*
GROUP: *Ẹ̀ẹ̀sún Òmù.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Omù?*
GROUP: *Omù Arẹ̀rẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Arẹ̀rẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Arẹ̀rẹ̀ Mọ̀gbá.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Mọ̀gbá?*
GROUP: *Mọ̀gbá Ajígbọ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ajígbọ̀*
GROUP: *Ajígbọ̀ Ṣẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ṣẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Ṣẹ̀ erin.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ erin?*
GROUP: *Erin ní Imù.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Imù?*
GROUP: *Imù òtòsì.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ òtòsì?*
GROUP: *Òtòsì egbére.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ egbére?*
GROUP: *Egbére Ìnàko.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ìnàko?*
GROUP: *Ìnàko àgbá.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ àgbá?*
GROUP: *Àgbàlagbàrìṣà.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Órìṣà?*

GROUP: *Òrìsà Àfọ̀n.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Àfọ̀n?*
GROUP: *Àfọ̀níyèẹ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́'yèẹ́?*
GROUP: *Ìyẹ́ òmugòmu.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ òmugòmu?*
GROUP: *Òmugòmu-balẹ̀-kó-sẹ́rù.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ sẹ́rù?*
GROUP: *Sẹ́rù àlà.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ àlà?*
GROUP: *Àlà ọba.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jọ́ba?*
GROUP: *Ọba ní Gbọ̀ngíàn.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Gbọ̀ngíàn?*
GROUP: *Gbọ̀ngíàn dọ́gbẹ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ọgbẹ́?*
GROUP: *Ọgbẹ́ gbu.*
LEADER: *Kí ní n jẹ́ gbu?*
GROUP: *Gbu ẹsẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ẹsẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Ẹsẹ̀ alálẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ alálẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Alálẹ̀ purẹ̀kẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ purẹ̀kẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Purẹ̀kẹ̀ yẹ̀lú.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ yẹ̀lú?*
GROUP: *Yẹ̀lú òréré.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ òréré?*
GROUP: *Òréré ibi a bíni sí níí yẹni.*
Mo dàpáàdì,
Tọ́ kú lé abahun lórí peegede.[2]
(LEADER: I open this *ìmọ́* song-riddle.
GROUP: *Ìmọ́* of battle/war.
LEADER: Which war?
GROUP: War in the attic.
LEADER: Which attic?
GROUP: The attic known as Mọ̀rẹ̀.
LEADER: What is Mọ̀rẹ̀?
GROUP: Mọ̀rẹ̀ at Ipọn.
LEADER: What is Ipọn?

Group: Ipọn of Olú.
Leader: What is Olú?
Group: Olúdósù.
Leader: What is Osù?
Group: The Osù of Ọrà.
Leader: What is Ọrà?
Group: Ọrà of at Ihíe.
Leader: What is Ihíe?
Group: The Ihíe of the lump.
Leader: What is lump?
Group: Ikókórodò.
Leader: What is called swelling?
Group: The swelling that busted.
Leader: What is called bust?
Group: The bust at *àbàlà*.
Leader: What is called *àbàlà*?
Group: Àbàlà, the one who owns the forest.
Leader: Which forest owner?
Group: The owner of the forest at Kòso.
Leader: Which Kòso?
Group: The Kòso in Ejió.
Leader: Which Ejió?
Group: The Ejió in Ifẹ̀.
Leader: Which Ifẹ̀?
Group: The beaded Ifẹ̀.
Leader: Which bead?
Group: The beaded one in Òmù.
Leader: What is Omù?
Group: The Omù at Arẹrẹ.
Leader: What is Arẹrẹ?
Group: The Arẹrẹ in Mọ̀gbá.
Leader: What is called Mọ̀gbá?
Group: Mọ̀gbá in Ajígbọ̀.
Leader: What is called Ajígbọ̀?
Group: Ajígbọ̀ the ruler with authority.
Leader: What authority?
Group: Authority like that of the elephant.
Leader: Which elephant?
Group: The elephant at Imù.
Leader: Which Imù?

GROUP: Imù of the poor.
LEADER: What is it that is poor?
GROUP: The poor and miserable goblin.
LEADER: Which goblin?
GROUP: The goblin at Ìnàko.
LEADER: Which Ìnàko?
GROUP: The Ìnàko of cask.
LEADER: What is called cask?
GROUP: The aged deity/divinity.
LEADER: Which deity or divinity?
GROUP: The deity of Àfọ̀n that can fly.
LEADER: What is called Àfọ̀n?
GROUP: The Àfọ̀n with feathers.
LEADER: Which feathers?
GROUP: The feathers of ògòmugòmu (the strange bird).
LEADER: What (bird) is so called?
GROUP: The ògòmugòmu that perches fearlessly.
LEADER: What is this fearlessness?
GROUP: The fearlessness that is spotless.
LEADER: Which spotless?
GROUP: The spotless one owned by the king.
LEADER: Which king?
GROUP: The king in Gbọ̀ngíàn.
LEADER: What is called Gbọ̀ngíàn?
GROUP: The Gbọ̀ngíàn with a wound.
LEADER: Which wound?
GROUP: A deep wound cut.
LEADER: Which deep cut?
GROUP: The deep cut in the leg.
LEADER: Which leg?
GROUP: The leg with which we walk the ground.
LEADER: Which ground?
GROUP: The ground that spreads.
LEADER: What is it that makes it spread?
GROUP: The spread that beautifies the city.
LEADER: What is it that makes the beauty so obvious?
GROUP: The beauty that shows from afar.
LEADER: How far?
GROUP: As far as one's place of birth that befits one.
I am now like a potsherd,
That is used to cover the tortoise.)

The last line, serving as an "escape mechanism" for the respondents, signals the end of the dialogue. The sentence literally translates to: "After this last response there is nothing more to say to prove that the group is capable of answering any question posed by the leader of the performance session."

On occasion, it is permissible for a leader making the call to conclude the song-riddle differently. For instance, in the conclusion of the next song-riddle (a variant of *Text 2* and performed by a different group during our fieldwork), the leader switches from song to a set of poetic utterances. These utterances praise the personality of the goddess of the Sea (Yemọja) mentioned in the group's answer to the last question posed. After the poetic salute, the very end of the recitation features a few words of chitchat addressed to the goddess of the sea (Yemọja) and a final statement regarding the raison d'etre of the poetic salute.

Text 3

LEADER: *Ta ni yó lọ ọjà alẹ́ o?*
GROUP: *Èmi ó lọ!*
LEADER: *Bá mi kórú olóókan bọ̀.*
GROUP: *N ò lọ mọ́.*
LEADER: *Ǹjẹ́ o bú'mọ̀ọ́.*
GROUP: *Mo bú'mọ̀ọ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ mọ̀ọ́?*
GROUP: *Ìmọ́ ládé.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jádé?*
GROUP: *Adéṣípò.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ 'pò?*
GROUP: *Ipò ìṣẹ́rẹ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ìṣẹ́rẹ́?*
GROUP: *Ìṣẹ́rẹ́ iṣẹ̀bí.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ìṣẹ̀bí?*
GROUP: *Ìṣẹ̀bí Ọmọ́yọ.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ọmọ́yọ?*
GROUP: *Ọmọ́yọ àpópó.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ àpópó?*
GROUP: *Àpópó òrìṣà.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'órìṣà?*
GROUP: *Òrìṣà alayé.*
LEADER: *Kí ni ń j'álayé?*

GROUP: *Alayé alọ̀run.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'álọ̀run?*
GROUP: *Alọ̀run ìgbálá.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ìgbálá?*
GROUP: *Ìgbálá ìgbásẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ìgbásẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Ìgbásẹ́ arẹrẹ.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'árẹrẹ?*
GROUP: *Arẹrẹ Ìmògún.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ 'Mògún?*
GROUP: *Imògún-Onírè.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Onírè?*
GROUP: *Onírè apàtẹ.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Ápàtẹ?*
GROUP: *Apàtẹ ìlẹ̀kẹ̀.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ ìlẹ̀kẹ̀?*
GROUP: *Ìlẹ̀kẹ̀ ayíta.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'áyíta?*
GROUP: *Ayíta ayùnrẹ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'áyùnrẹ́?*
GROUP: *Ayùnré àkókó.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'ákòókó?*
GROUP: *Àkókó alumọ.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'álumọ?*
GROUP: *Alumọ arère.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'árère?*
GROUP: *Arère oníyùn.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'óníyùn?*
GROUP: *Oníyùn onídẹ.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'ónídẹ?*
GROUP: *Onídẹ Kábíyèsí.*
LEADER: *Kín ní ń jẹ́ Kábíyèsí?*
GROUP: *Kábíyèsí Aláàfin.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Áláàfin?*
GROUP: *Aláàfin t'Ọ̀yọ́.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ t'Ọ̀yọ́?*
GROUP: *Ọ̀yọ́ apá Ọ̀ṣun.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ apá Ọ̀ṣun?*
GROUP: *Apá Ọ̀ṣun Yemọja.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Yemọja?*
GROUP: *Iyemọja Olódò.*

LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Ólódò?*
GROUP: *Olódò aládéomi.*
LEADER: *Pẹ́lẹ̀ o, aládéomi.*
Ọmọ òjorìgì-jorìgì.
Ọmọ Ṣadélórí.
Ṣedélórí ọmọ ìwáṣẹ̀.
Ìwáṣẹ̀ baba ayé.
Baba ayé, ọkọ Wúràọ́lá.
Wúràọ́lá, ọmọ Àgbìgbò.
Àgbìgbò, ọmọ Páàrì.
Ò bá jẹ́ ta mí ṣèré-sèré.
Bóyá mo jẹ́ wá wò ọ́.
Ǹ bá wá wò ọ́ ná.
Kí n tó bomi fẹ́yẹ wẹ̀.
Èhìn èyí ni ǹ bá tó bú 'mọ̀ọ́.
Ìmọ́ ọmọ àrọ̀.
Àrọ̀ mi, àrọ̀ yéè.
Tàìrí irọ́ pa kọ́,
Ló ń mú mi dá àrọ̀.
Tàìróríkì kì kọ́,
Ló mu mi ki Olódò Aládé omi.
Bí kò ṣe ti Àgbọnnìrègún,
Àgbọnnìrègún,
Tí ń pọjọ́ ikú dà roro, dà roro.
Bú mi kí n já 'mọ̀ọ́ rẹ.
Ọmọ onírọ́.
Eéè! Àrọ̀ kò rọ̀ o![3]

(LEADER: Who would go to the night market?
GROUP: I will go!
LEADER: Get me one penny worth of locust bean.
GROUP: I do not wish to go again.
LEADER: Bring forth an *ìmọ́* song-riddle, then.
GROUP: I open an *ìmọ́* riddle game.
LEADER: Which *ìmọ́* riddle game?
GROUP: The *ìmọ́* riddle game that is crowned.
LEADER: Which crown?
GROUP: The name Adéṣípò (meaning the crown that is back to its rightful position).
LEADER: Which position?
GROUP: The position of ìṣẹ́ṣẹ́.
Leader: Which ìṣẹ́ṣẹ́?

GROUP: The Ìṣẹ́ṛẹ́ of Ìṣẹ̀bí.
LEADER: What is it that is called Ìṣẹ̀bí?
GROUP: The Ìṣẹ̀bí of Ọmọ́yọ.
LEADER: Which Ọmọ́yọ?
GROUP: The Ọmọ́yọ at àpópó.
LEADER: Which àpópó?
GROUP: Àpópó of the divinity.
LEADER: Which divinity?
GROUP: The earthly divinity.
LEADER: Which earthly being?
GROUP: The omnipotent one.
LEADER: What is called omnipotent?
GROUP: Omnipotent that is omniscient.
LEADER: What is omniscient?
GROUP: Omniscient of salvation.
LEADER: What is salvation?
GROUP: Salvation that spreads endlessly.
LEADER: How spread?
GROUP: It spreads as far as the base of Ògún.
LEADER: Which base of Ògún?
GROUP: The base of Ògún known as Ìmògún-onírè.
LEADER: What is Onírè?
GROUP: Onírè, the *apàtẹ*—one who arranges her wares on a flat tray for display.
LEADER: What is it that the ware owner displayed?
GROUP: It is beads that the owner of the wares displayed.
LEADER: What (type) of beads?
GROUP: The beads of bright color.
LEADER: What type of bright color?
GROUP: As bright as the color of *ayùnṛẹ́* tree.
LEADER: What is it that is called *ayùnṛẹ́*?
GROUP: The ayùnṛẹ́ of an *àkókó* tree.
LEADER: What is it that is called *àkókó*?
GROUP: Àkókó of *alumọ*.
LEADER: What is called *alumọ*?
GROUP: Alumọ of an *arère* tree.
LEADER: What is called *arère* tree?
GROUP: The coral brand arère tree.
LEADER: Which coral brand?
GROUP: The coral brand made of brass.
LEADER: What type of brass?

Group: The brass for His Royal Majesty.
Leader: Which Royal Majesty?
Group: His Royal Majesty, the Aláàfin.
Leader: Which Aláàfin?
Group: The king at the palace of Ọ̀yọ́ (town).
Leader: Which Ọ̀yọ́?
Group: Ọ̀yọ́ town along Ọ̀ṣun.
Leader: Which Ọ̀ṣun?
Group: The Ọ̀ṣun of Yemọja.
Leader: Which Yemọja?
Group: Iyemọja, goddess of the sea.
Leader: Which goddess of the sea?
Group: The goddess of the sea, ruler of the water.
Leader: I hail you, ruler of the water.
The offspring of Ògjorìgì-jorìgì.
Offspring of Ṣadélóri.
Ṣadélórí the offspring of ìwáṣẹ̀.
Iwáṣẹ̀ lord of the world.
Lord of the world, master of Wúràọlá.
Wúràolá, offspring of Àgbìgbò.
Àgbìgbò, offspring of Pàárì.
You might just sting me playfully.
Maybe I would come and visit you.
I would have come to visit first.
Before I would say I want to bathe the bird.
After which I would have taken to *ìmọ́* riddle game.
Ìmọ́ riddle game, offspring of the puzzle.
My riddle game, hail the puzzles.
It is not in want of falsehood,
That has made me create riddles.
It is not in want of appraisal of praises,
That made me salute the ruler of the sea.
If not for Àgbọnnìrègún,
Àgbọnnìrègún,
Who distorts the day of death severely.
Insult me and see if I will not disprove your *ìmọ́* riddle game.
Offspring of liar.
Oh my, we just have to end this *àrọ̀* song-riddle!)

Once again, the leader switches from song to poetry to signal the conclusion.

A second variety exists in the arrangement of the antiphonal group performance: one section of the group adheres to a stable chorus/refrain while the other section freely changes the text. In the following series of exchanges, the chorus/refrain is stable while the lead continually changes.

Text 4

LEADER: *Ó peṣinṣin sẹ́nu.*
Wọ́n ní kó tu ú dànù.
Ó ní, "ta ní jẹ́ tu adùn báyìí nu?"
Wọ́n ní kó gbé e jẹ.
Ó ní, "ta ló lè gbé èèmọ́ ńlá jẹ?"
Ó wá so sí kò-ṣeé-ká.
A ká a tán, ó bọ́ sí kò ṣeé-mú.
A mú un tán, a kò ríná fi sun ún.
Tẵa bá sun ún tán, níbo la ó ti jẹ ẹ́?
Tẵa bá jẹ ẹ́ tán, ibo la ó ti yàgbẹ́ ẹ̀?
Ó donífèrèkun-fèkun.
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "ẹ ké sájá yìí fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní, kí lajá yìí ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "kájá ó kómí jẹ fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Ajá lóun ò ní kómí jẹ.*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "Ẹ pe ẹkùn fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní, kí ni ẹkùn ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "kẹ́kùn wá pajá fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Ẹkùn lóun ò pajá.*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ni, "Ẹ pe ọdẹ yìí fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní kí lọdẹ ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "kọ́dẹ wá pẹkùn fún mi."*

GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Ọdẹ lóun ò pẹkùn..*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ni, "Ẹ ké séjò yìí fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní kí lejò ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "kéjo wá sán ọdẹ fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Ejò lóun kò sán ọdẹ.*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "Ẹ pe ọ̀gọ yìí fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní kí lọ̀gọ ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "Ọ̀gọ á pejò fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Ọ̀gọ lóun ò pejò.*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "Ẹ pe iná yìí fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní kí niná ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "iná ó jo ọ̀gọ fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Iná lóun ò jọ́gọ.*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "Ẹ pe omi fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní kí lomi ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "kómi wá paná fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Omi lóun ò paná.*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "Ẹ pe òṣùmàrè fún mi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Wọ́n ní kí lòṣùmàrè ó ṣe fún mi?*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: *Mo ní, "k'óṣùmàrè wá gbẹ omi."*
GROUP: *Fèkun.*

LEADER: *Òṣùmàrè kọ̀, ó lóun ò gb'omi.*
Omi kọ̀, omi ò paná.
Iná kọ̀, iná ò jọ́gọ.
Ọ̀gọ kọ̀, ọ̀gọ ò pẹjò.
Ejò kọ̀, ejò ò san'dẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀, ọdẹ ò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀, ẹkùn ò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀, ajá kò kómí jẹ.
GROUP: *Fèrèkun-fèkun.*[4]
(LEADER: He killed a housefly with his mouth.
He was asked to spit it out.
He said, "Who will spit out a delicacy?"
He was told to swallow it and go.
He said, "Who will swallow a strange thing?"
Now it cannot be twisted.
We twisted it, but it cannot be apprehended.
We caught it, but we cannot find the fire to roast it.
If we roast it, where would we eat it?
If we eat it, where would we defecate?
Now, it has turned to the *fèrèkun* song-riddle game.
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: I said, "Summon this dog for me."
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: They said, "What do I need this dog for?"
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: I said, "Let this dog come and eat this excretion."
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: The dog refused to eat the excretion.
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: I said, "Summon the leopard for me."
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: They asked, "What would the leopard do for me?"
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: I said, "The leopard will kill the dog."
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: The leopard refused to kill the dog.
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: I said, "Summon this hunter for me."
GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: They asked what would the hunter do for me?
GROUP: *Fèkun.*

Leader: I said, "The hunter will kill the leopard."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: The hunter refused to kill the leopard.
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "Summon this snake for me."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: They asked what the snake would do?
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "The snake will bite the hunter."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: The snake refused to bite the hunter.
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "Summon this club for me."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: They asked what the club would do?
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "Let the club kill the snake."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: The club refused to kill the snake.
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "Summon the fire for me."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: They asked what the fire would do?
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "The fire will burn the club."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: The fire refused to burn the club.
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "Summon the water for me."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: They asked what the water would do?
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "The water will put out the fire."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: Water refused to put out the fire.
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "Summon the rainbow for me."
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: They asked what the rainbow would do?
Group: *Fèkun.*
Leader: I said, "The rainbow will evaporate the water."

GROUP: *Fèkun.*
LEADER: The rainbow refused to evaporate the water.
The water refused; the water would not put out the fire.
The fire refused; the fire would not burn the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not bite the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.
The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the excretion.
GROUP: *Fèrèkun-fèkun.*)

It is important to note that other arrangements (not mentioned here) are also possible in the delivery of *àrọ̀* song-riddle. These arrangements are merely further variations of the monochoral group performance or antiphonal group performance already discussed. Nevertheless, all the various forms of *àrọ̀* song-riddle have one common feature: schematic structure. While other genres of Yorùbá oral verse are recognized by the peculiar linguistic structure of their component lines or by the lexical peculiarities of their utterances, the distinguishing feature of *àrọ̀* song-riddle as noted by Ọládélé Awóbùlúyì (1971) is its "chain structure—a structure so real and characteristic that it also serves as the name of this set of songs itself" (59). For *àrọ̀*, according to one etymological interpretation offered by Adébóyè Babalọlá (1970), means "*à-rọ̀ = èyí tí a fi rọ̀* meaning 'that which is cast in the form of a chain,' one link hanging down from another" (1).

This unique structure of *àrọ̀* song-riddle is brought about through the interplay of structural repetition, lexical repetition, or what Awóbùlúyì refers to as "lexical seriation"—a system that "consists essentially of recurrent lines with similar or identical grammatical structure, at regular points within which key lexical items are repeated usually consecutively, at the rate of one per line" (59). Awóbùlúyì goes on to identify two different kinds of lexical schemes that are produced in *àrọ̀* song-riddle, depending on how many times particular words get repeated: the "zig-zag scheme" (when a word is repeated only twice) and the "crenellated scheme" (when words are repeated three or more times).

The remaining section of this chapter includes discussion of the function of *àrọ̀* song-riddle, a genre based on repetition (as with other forms of Yorùbá oral verse). It should be noted that repetition in *àrọ̀* is used to emphasize and intensify the theme of the repeated sentences. The strategy of reiteration may therefore accomplish the following goals: (i) the audience pays closer attention to the content of the

sentences repeated and/or (ii) the target of the sentences is made forcefully aware of the desires of the singer. When a group of sentences is consistently repeated after other sentences are sandwiched between, the motif contained in the initial grouping draws increased attention.

The Role of Àrọ̀ Song-Riddle in the Intellectual and Social Development of the Child

Like children everywhere,Yorùbá children develop and play with a familiar range of games and verses, including tongue twisters or nonsense songs, singing games, catch rhymes, song-riddles, and so on. In terms of a Yorùbá child's linguistic development, song-riddles serve a key role. Through reinforcement, examples, and precepts, the child is gradually initiated into her/his linguistic community. Particular attention is paid to acquisition of vocabulary and pronunciation of difficult phonemes. Some *àrọ̀* song-riddles are used as tongue twisters specifically created to improve and enhance the child's enunciation. It is often said in Yorùbá that *ọmọ tí yóò bá jẹ́ àṣàmú, kékeré ni yóò ti ṣe ẹnu ṣámúṣámú,* meaning that a child who is going to be sharp will be clear and precise in her/his speech from childhood.

The purpose of the tongue twister in the following song-riddle text is for the child's speech training:

Ebi ń pa ọ́, o yà sóko.
O yà sóko tán, o ká ìbẹ́pẹ.
O ká ìbẹ́pẹ tán, o jẹ̀bẹ́pẹ.
O jẹ̀bẹ́pẹ tán, ẹnu rẹ ya.
Ẹnu rẹ ya tán, o fàdí sí i.
O fàdí sí i tán, ẹnu rẹ san.
Àlàáfíà kóo wà bí?
Ṣé ara rẹ le?[5]
(Hungry, you stopped at the farm.
Having stopped at the farm, you plucked the pawpaw.
Having plucked the pawpaw, you ate the pawpaw.
Having eaten the pawpaw, your mouth burst.
Your mouth having burst, you applied ointment to it.
Having applied ointment, your mouth healed up.
How do you feel?
Hope you are in good health?)

In the above excerpt, the emphasis is on the pronunciation of phonemes represented in the writing system as vowels {a}, {ẹ}, and {an} and consonants {b}, {p}, and {t}; the aesthetic of the rhythm in this *àrọ̀* based tongue twister overrides the meaning in the translation. Strictly speaking, tongue twisters are generally untranslatable; moreover, the beauty of the rhythm is often lost in translation.

Linguistic training in song-riddle is not restricted to *àrọ̀* based tongue twisters; rather, the child's phonemic pronunciation may also be developed through recitation of long poetic lines in musical form—as shown in the following example:

GROUP A: *Kí ní n lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Ewúrẹ́ ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Àgùntàn ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Ìgi ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Irọ́ ńlá!*
GROUP A: *Ẹyẹ ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Ejò ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Ẹja ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Òkúta ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Irọ́ ńlá!*
GROUP A: *Adìẹ ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Ajá ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Lẹẹ́jẹ̀.*
GROUP A: *Ẹyin ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Irọ́ ńlá!*
GROUP A: *Ìgbín ń lẹ́jẹ̀?*
GROUP B: *Irọ́ ńlá!*[6]
(GROUP A: What is it that has blood?
GROUP B: Lots of blood.
GROUP A: Has a she-goat blood?
GROUP B: Lots of blood.
GROUP A: Has a sheep blood?
GROUP B: Lots of blood.

Group A: Has a tree blood?
Group B: (That is) a big lie!
Group A: Has a bird blood?
Group B: Lots of blood.
Group A: Has a snake blood?
Group B: Lots of blood.
Group A: Has a fish blood?
Group B: Lots of blood.
Group A: Has a stone blood?
Group B: (That is) a big lie!
Group A: Has a hen blood?
Group B: Lots of blood.
Group A: Has a dog blood?
Group B: Lots of blood.
Group A: Has an egg blood?
Group B: (That is) a big lie!
Group A: Has a snail blood?
Group B: (That is) a big lie!)

The whole point of this *àrọ̀* song-riddle is to get the child to say "blood" after an inanimate object is mentioned. A mistake may result in laughter and sometimes a friendly scolding. In this way, the child's linguistic competence is encouraged along with her/his intellectual development. Song-ridde texts such as the one above in musical form also assist the Yorùbá child in building a strong vocabulary. Words in the above text fall into two primary groups: animate objects (*ewúrẹ́* [goat], *àgùntàn* [sheep], *ẹyẹ* [bird], *ejò* [serpent], *ẹja* [fish], *adìẹ* [hen], *ajá* [dog], and *ìgbín* [snail]) and inanimate objects (*igi* [tree], *òkúta* [stone], and *ẹyin* [egg]).

At times, the key lexical items in song-riddle, be they nouns or verbs, may be seriated either in an ascending or descending order. The order is determined by semantic considerations such as potency, value, temporal location, or convention, and so on. Thus, in the following example, the *àrọ̀* song-riddle is embedded in the *oríkì orílẹ̀* (lineage poetry) of Òpómúléró[7]:

Òpó tí ò gbọ̀ràn,
Ẹ jẹ́ a fẹnu rẹ̀ gbúngi.
Igi tí ò gbọ̀ràn,
Ẹ jẹ́ a mú kanná.
Iná tí ò gbọ̀ràn,
Ẹ jẹ́ a bomi pa á.

Omi tí ò gbọ̀ràn,
Ẹ jẹ́ a mú pọntí.
Ọtí tí ò gbọ̀ràn,
Ẹ jẹ́ a mú un fọ́mọ́ líle.
Ọmọ líle tí ò gbọ̀ràn,
Ẹ jẹ́ a kọjú irú wọn sógun[8]
(If a post proves stubborn,
We should ram its tip into a tree.
If the tree proves stubborn,
We should set it on fire.
If the fire proves stubborn,
We should put it out with water.
If the water proves stubborn,
We should use it to brew wine.
It the wine proves stubborn,
We should serve it to the problem child.
If the problem child proves stubborn,
We should send such a child off to the war fronts.)

The words *òpó* (post), *igi* (tree), *iná* (fire), *omi* (water), *ọti* (wine), *ọmọ líle* (problem child), and *ogun* (war) occur in an order of increasing potency or strength: fire is stronger than wood, water is more powerful than fire, and wine stronger than water, and so on. The opposite holds true in the text below, excerpted from the conclusion of Text 1 (previously cited):

Òjò kọ̀, òjò kò poòrùn.
Òòrùn kọ̀, òòrùn kò gbẹ omi.
Omi kọ̀, omi kò paná.
Iná kọ̀, iná kò jógi.
Igi kọ̀, igi kò pejò.
Ejò kọ̀, ejò kò pọdẹ.
Ọdẹ kọ̀, ọdẹ kò pẹkùn.
Ẹkùn kọ̀, ẹkùn kò pajá.
Ajá kọ̀, ajá kò jẹmí ọmọ.
(The rain refused; the rain will not drive away the sun.
The sun refused; the sun will not dry up the water.
The water refused, the water will not put out the fire.
The fire refused; the fire would not burn the club.
The club refused; the club would not kill the snake.
The snake refused; the snake would not kill the hunter.
The hunter refused; the hunter would not kill the leopard.

The leopard refused; the leopard would not kill the dog.
The dog refused; the dog would not eat the child's excrement.)

In this text, one finds descending order. That is, each object mentioned is presumably stronger than the one immediately following it: *òjò* versus *òòrùn* (rain versus sun), *òòrùn* versus *omi* (sun versus water), *omi* versus *iná* (water versus fire), *iná* versus *igi* (fire versus club), *igi* versus *ejò* (club versus snake), *ejò* versus *ọdẹ* (snake versus hunter), *ọdẹ* versus *ẹkùn* (hunter versus leopard), *ẹkùn* versus *ajá* (leopard versus dog), *ajá* versus *imí* (dog versus excrement). However, not all *àrọ̀* song-riddles contain vocabulary arranged in such ostensibly logical order—either descending or ascending nor in order of increasing potency or strength. Instead, the listing of lexical items, be they nouns or verbs, may occur arbitrarily, as demonstrated below:

OTHERS: *Ta ló méyọ owó mi níhùn-ín?*
LEADER: *Èmi ni.*
OTHERS: *Kí lo fi ṣe?*
LEADER: *Mo fi repo.*
OTHERS: *Epo ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ajá ti lá a.*
OTHERS: *Ajá ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ajá wọlẹ̀.*
OTHERS: *Ilẹ̀ ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ilẹ̀ taṣu.*
OTHERS: *Iṣu ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Iṣu lájà.*
OTHERS: *Àjà ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Àjà Mọ̀rẹ̀.*
OTHERS: *Mọ̀rẹ̀ ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Mọ̀rẹ̀-mọ̀nà.*
OTHERS: *Ọ̀nà ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ọ̀nà níye.*
OTHERS: *Iye ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Iye omi.*
OTHERS: *Omi ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Omi lorò.*
OTHERS: *Orò ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Orò bẹ́ Ìgan.*
OTHERS: *Ìgàn ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ìgan Ìgbéwó.*

OTHERS: *Ìgbéwó ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ìgbéwó ní Ifẹ̀.*
OTHERS: *Ifẹ̀ ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ifẹ̀ eèsún*
OTHERS: *Èèsún ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Eèsún lómù.*
OTHERS: *Òmù ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Òmù arère.*
OTHERS: *Arère ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Arère nígbà.*
OTHERS: *Igbà ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Igbà ọ̀mọ̀ràn.*
OTHERS: *Ọ̀mọ̀ràn ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Ọ̀mọ̀ràn nídà.*
OTHERS: *Idà ńkọ́?*
LEADER: *Idà la fi í jagun;*
Òun la fi í bẹ́rí ẹni tí n bini.[9]
(OTHERS: Who took my cowry here?
LEADER: I did.
OTHERS: What did you use it for?
LEADER: I used it to buy palm oil.
OTHERS: What of the palm oil?
LEADER: The dog has slurped it up.
OTHERS: What of the dog?
LEADER: The dog is buried in the mother earth.
OTHERS: What of the mother earth?
LEADER: The ground has sprouted the yam.
OTHERS: What of the yam?
LEADER: The yam is in the attic.
OTHERS: Which attic?
LEADER: The attic at Mọ̀rẹ̀.
OTHERS: Which Mọ̀rẹ̀?
LEADER: The Mọ̀rẹ̀ of the road.
OTHERS: Which road?
LEADER: The road that has economic value.
OTHERS: What of economic value?
LEADER: Economic value of water.
OTHERS: What of water?
LEADER: Water of bull-roarer.
OTHERS: What of the bull-roarer?
LEADER: The bull-roarer that is called Ìgan.

OTHERS: What of the Ìgàn?
LEADER: The ìgàn of Ìgbéwó.
OTHERS: What of Ìgbéwó?
LEADER: Ìgbéwó at Ifẹ̀.
OTHERS: What of Ifẹ̀?
LEADER: Ifẹ̀ of wild grass
OTHERS: What of wild grass?
LEADER: Wild grass with monkey nuts.
OTHERS: What of monkey nuts?
LEADER: Monkey nuts of Arère.
OTHERS: What of Arère?
LEADER: The pawned Arère.
OTHERS: What of pawning?
LEADER: The pawning by the knowledgeable.
OTHERS: What of the knowledgeable person?
LEADER: It is the knowledgeable who owns the sword.
OTHERS: Which sword?
LEADER: Sword is what we use in war;
It is what we use to cut off the head of the interrogator.)

One may successfully argue that the arrangement of *ilẹ̀* (earth), *iṣu* (yam), and *àjà* (attic) is logical because of the relationship among the three within the context of the song-riddle. The inevitability of listing *ilẹ̀* (ground), *iṣu* (yam), and *àjà* (attic) one after the other can be justified as follows: small portions of yam tubers are planted in ridges cultivated on the farmland (or earth) from which new whole yam tubers will grow for about nine months prior to harvest. The attic, on the other hand, is where an excess of harvested yam tubers are stored during those months between one harvest season and the next. However, all the other nouns in this text seem arbitrary; that is, they seem to be listed in no particular order. These include *epo* (palm oil), *ajá* (dog), *Mọ̀rẹ̀* (a neighborhood in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ town), *ọ̀nà* (road), *iye* (economic value), *omi* (water), *ìgan* (meaning unknown), *ìgbéwó* (meaning unknown), *Ifẹ̀* (a Yorùbá town), *eèsún* (wild grass), *òmù* (meaning unknown), *arère* (type of tree), *igbà* (pawning), *ọ̀mọ̀ràn* (a knowledgeable person), and *idà* (sword).

Similar to tongue twisters but serving instead as aide-mémoires to help children count are mnemonic song-riddles. These *àrọ̀* song-riddles are composed specifically to help the child count from one to ten or, at times, up to twenty. Couched in verse language, they are easier for the child to remember than a conventional numbering system. Here are two examples.

*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ení**, ó d**ení**.*
***Ení** lọmọdé ń kawó lode Ọ̀yọ́.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**èjì**, ó d**èjì**.*
***Èjì** làgbà ń ka ọmọ ayò n'Ífẹ̀.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ẹ̀ta**, ó d**ẹ̀ta**.*
***Àta**mú lọmọ ọdẹ ń ta ẹran.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ẹ̀rin**, ó d**ẹ̀rin**.*
***Ẹ̀ni** ó **rín**ni là á rín.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**àrún**, ó d**àrún**.*
*Ohun tí yóò r**un**ni, àá jìnnà sí i ni.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ẹ̀fà**, ó d**ẹ̀fà**.*
***Ẹ̀fà** ilé, **ẹ̀fà** oko, ni tẹ̀rúkọ́.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**èje**, ó d**èje**.*
*Olúgbọ́n kò ní ṣorò kó má k**èje**.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ẹ̀jọ**, ó d**ẹ̀jọ**.*
***Ẹ**ni tó bíni làá **jọ**.*
Aṣọ tó wuni làá ró.
Ẹ̀wù tó wuni làá wọ̀.
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ẹ̀sán**, ó d**ẹ̀sán**.*
***Ẹ̀sán** ilé, **ẹ̀sán** òde.*
*Kí Ọba Olúwa jẹ́ kálẹ́ ó **san** wá.*
*Bí a bá ń pé ó d**ẹ̀wá**, ó d**ẹ̀wá**.*
*Ọ̀rẹ́ tó **wá** ni là á **wá**.*[10]
(When we count in ones, we say one.
A child counts in ones at Ọ̀yọ́ (town).
When we count in twos, we say two.
The elders count *ayò* game in twos at Ifẹ̀.
When we count in threes, we say three.
The hunter targets the game to kill it.
When we count in fours, we say four.
We only laugh at those who make fun of us.
When we count in fives, we say five.
One needs to be wary of unsafe environments.
When we count in sixs, we say six.
The hoe handle draws to itself when in use.
When we count in sevens, we say seven.
The festival of Olúgbọ́n takes seven days.
When we count in eights, we say eight.
One resembles one's biological parents.
It makes sense to wear one's best dress.
It makes sense to wear one's best attire.

When we count in nines, we say nine.
Vengeance is inevitable.
May God Almighty bless us in our old age.
When we count in tens, we say ten.
It is logical to reciprocate good friendship.)

When children sing this song, the words may not seem to have much meaning (most especially in the English translation) until we pay attention to the word-play in the bold words in the Yorùbá text. These are pairs of lexical items that appear similar by their tones, although the words are phonologically plausible in Yorùbá language. The word-play and lexical items serve as useful rhythmic pegs on which to hang the numbers one through ten. Inquisitive children may want to know the identity of Olúgbọ́n mentioned in the above text. Who was Olúgbọ́n? They will then learn the story of this renowned mythological Yorùbá king from their parents.

In the same vein, the next text serves both as aide-mémoire and as good practice in controlled breathing. The child is expected to sing from lines one to ten first and later, up to line twenty in one long breath. If s/he stops to breathe, the performance must begin all over again:

Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dení.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dejì.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀ta.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀rin.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dàrún.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀fà.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dèje.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀jọ.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀sán.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀wá.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dọ̀kànlá.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dèjìlá.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀tàlá.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀rìnlá.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀ẹ́dógún.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀rìndínlógún.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dẹ̀tàdínlógún.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dèjìdínlógún.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dọ̀kàndínlógún.
Ká múgbá làmù, ká fi dámù; ó dogún.[11]

(Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's one.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's two.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's three.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's four.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's five.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's six.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's seven.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's eight.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's nine.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's ten.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's eleven.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's twelve.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's thirteen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's fourteen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's fifteen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's sixteen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's seventeen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's eighteen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's nineteen.
Take the calabash off the water-pot and cover it back; it's twenty.)

Song-riddles, such as the ones discussed thus far, provide solid foundations in language acquisition, and these linguistic fruits are reaped throughout a child's lifetime.

A separate group of *àrọ̀* song-riddles are used in the process of socializing the child. When such song-riddles are composed, certain biases are passed on to the child that may influence their reactions to certain issues for a long period of time. First on the list of such issues is the special recognition given in many *àrọ̀* texts to two Yorùbá towns and their paramount rulers, regularly addressed in song-riddles by their official titles—the Aláàfin (King) of Ọ̀yọ́ (city) and the Ọ̀ọ̀ni (King) of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ (city). In the following excerpt of *àrọ̀* cited in full earlier in Text 3, the Aláàfin is presented as the king with "absolute power of authority," which no one can challenge or question:

Onídẹ Kábíyèsí.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ kábíyèsí?
Kábíyèsí Aláàfin.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ Aláàfin?
Aláàfin t'Ọ̀yọ́.
Kí ní n jẹ́ t'Ọ̀yọ́?

T'Ọ̀yọ́ apá Ọ̀ṣun.
(The king with a beaded crown whose authority cannot be questioned.
Who is the king with a beaded crown whose authority cannot be questioned?
The king, Aláàfin.
Which Aláàfin?
The Aláàfin (King) of Ọ̀yọ́ (town).
Which Ọ̀yọ́?
The Ọ̀yọ́ along Ọ̀ṣun.)

Even though the Aláàfin is presented in this text as a semi-divine ruler who theoretically has absolute power, in practice he is a constitutional monarch who, by law, must consult his council of chiefs on a daily basis. This council, known as the Ọ̀yọ́mèsì under the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá political system, is saddled with the responsibility of advising the king on legislative matters, foreign policy, and issues of war and peace (Àtàndá, 1973 and Johnson, 1921). However, that is not the image of the Aláàfin presented to the audience in the *àrọ̀* song-riddle text cited above.

Also worthy of note is the representation of the city of Ilé-Ifẹ̀, the cradle of the Yorùbá people. Our fieldwork led to the following *àrọ̀* song-riddle text, the concluding part of which deserves a closer look.

Kí ní ń jẹ́ Alọ̀run?
Alọ̀run Ekòló.
Kí ní ń jékòló?
Ekòló Abíbà.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ Abíbà?
Abíbà Ifọ̀n.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ifọ̀n?
Ifọ̀n Ìyé.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ìyé
Ìyé Ejió.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ejió?
Ejió Ifẹ̀.
Kí ní n jé Ifẹ̀?
Ifẹ̀ ọmọ ọ̀fẹ̀ nífẹ̀.
Tíí fẹ ọmọ ọlọ́mọ lójú toto.[12]
(What is Alọ̀run?
The Alọ̀run of Ekòló.
What is *ekòló*?

Ekòló of Abíbà.
Which Abíbà?
The Abíbà of Ifọn.
Which Ifọn?
Ifọn at Ìyé.
Which Ìyé?
Ìyé of Ejió.
Which Ejió?
Ejió of Ifẹ̀.
Which Ifẹ̀?
The offspring of Ifẹ̀.
Where strangers' eyes are dilated excruciatingly.)

The end of this *àrọ̀* song-riddle text, referencing the city of Ifẹ̀, contains hidden meaning. Specifically, the second syllable *fẹ̀* is seized upon and used as a verb meaning "to widen." Then a negative association is made with the city, an implication that in ancient times Ifẹ̀ was a dreaded town whose inhabitants were subjected to torture or punishment. This image of Ifẹ̀ purposefully reaffirms the popular myth that residents of the city of Ifẹ̀ worship roughly 201 deities annually (Olúpọ̀nà, 2011). It is said that every day in sacred groves the traditional worshippers celebrate a festival dedicated to one of these deities. Often the festivals last more than 24 hours and involve both priestly activities in the palace and theatrical dramatizations in strategic locations within the city. The most spectacular festivals demand the king's participation. These include the Ìtàpá festival for Ọbàtálá and Ọbamerì, the Edì festival, the Ìgàrè masqueraders, and the Ọlọ́jọ́ festival.

It is also said that nonnatives of the city of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ are not allowed to witness most of these celebrations and, if anyone breaks this rule, s/he is severely punished. This punitive behavior is referred to metaphorically in the text as *fẹ ọmọ ọlọ́mọ lójú toto*, meaning to "torture strangers by dilating their eyes excruciatingly." Incorporating this kind of information in *àrọ̀* texts successfully engenders fear in children and young people, a not-so-subtle form of indoctrination or propaganda.

Furthermore, some texts of *àrọ̀* song-riddle previously cited mention a significant number of divinities or objects of worship (the *òrìṣà*) in Yorùbá traditional religion—albeit in passing. Oral traditions, according to Bọ́lájí Ìdòwú (1963: 67–68), often give a confusing impression of the exact number of divinities in Yorùbáland. Sometimes reference is made to *ẹ̀rùnlọ́jọ irúnmọlẹ̀* (700 divinities). Other reports include *igba irúnmọlẹ̀ ojùkọ̀tún, igba irúnmọlẹ̀ ojùkòsì* (200 divinities of the right hand and 200

divinities of the left hand—a total of 400) or *ọ̀kànlénú irúnmọ̀lẹ̀* (401 divinities). There are still *ọ̀ìlélégbèje irúnmọ̀lẹ̀ tí wọn ń lu ẹdan fún* (1,440 divinities for whom metal rods are sounded). Unfortunately, no common saying or proverb exists among the Yorùbá people designating a particular divinity as supremely important; although according to a particular Yorùbá myth, some 16 divinities originally descended to earth (Bascom, 1980: 413–419).

Nevertheless, certain divinities are generally designated as more important than others, and these might be called the major divinities. According to Nathaniel Akínrẹ̀mí Fádípẹ̀ (1970), the following divinities are universally worshipped in Yorùbáland from year to year: Èṣù, Ifá, Ọbàtálá, Ògún, Òrìṣà-Oko, Ọ̀ṣun, Ṣàngó, Ṣànpọ̀nná, and Yemọja (261–263). The order of seniority among these divinities is ambiguous, and scholars who have addressed the subject hold opposing views. While Bọ́lájí Ìdòwú (1963) posits that Òrìṣà-Ńlá or Ọbàtálá is the "supreme divinity" of the Yorùbá, Nathaniel Akínrẹ̀mí Fádípẹ̀ (1970) sees Ifá as the "most universal…*òrìṣà*" in Yorùbáland. Bádé Àjùwọ̀n (1981), for his part, presents Ògún as "first among equals" in the Yorùbá pantheon.

Among the aforementioned Yorùbá divinities, the *àrọ̀* in Text 3 cited earlier specifically refers to Ògún, the deity associated with anything metal; Ọ̀ṣun, goddess of the river; Iyemọja, goddess of the sea; and Àgbọnnìrègún or Ifá, god of divination as follows:

…..
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'árẹrẹ?*
GROUP: *Arẹrẹ Ìmògún.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ 'Mògún*
GROUP: *Imògún-Onírè.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ onírè?*
GROUP: *Onírè apàtẹ.*
…..
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ t'Ọ̀yọ́?*
GROUP: *Ọ̀yọ́ apá Ọ̀ṣun.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ apá Ọ̀ṣun?*
GROUP: *Apá Ọ̀ṣun Yemọja.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń jẹ́ Yemọja?*
GROUP: *Iyemọja Olódò.*
LEADER: *Kí ní ń j'Ólódò?*
GROUP: *Olódò aládéomi.*
Tàìróríkì kì kọ́,
Ló mu mi ki Olódò Aládé omi.

Bí kò ṣe ti Àgbọnnìrègún,
Àgbọnnìrègún,
Tí ń pọjọ́ ikú dà roro, dà roro.

(LEADER: How spread?
GROUP: It spreads as far as the base of *Ògún*.
LEADER: Which base of *Ògún*?
GROUP: The base of *Ògún* known as Ìmògún-onírè.
LEADER: What is *Onírè*?
GROUP: *Onírè*, the *apàtẹ*—one who arranges her wares on a flat tray for display

.....

LEADER: Which Ọ̀yọ́?
GROUP: Ọ̀yọ́ town along *Ọ̀ṣun*.
LEADER: Which *Ọ̀ṣun*?
GROUP: The *Ọ̀ṣun* of *Yemọja*.
LEADER: Which *Yemọja*?
GROUP: Iyemọja, goddess of the sea.
LEADER: Which goddess of the sea?
GROUP: The goddess of the sea, ruler of the water

...

It is not in want of appraisal of praises,
That made me salute the ruler of the sea.
If not for *Àgbọnnìrègún*,
Àgbọnnìrègún,
Who distorts the day of death severely.)

Although deities are not often referred to in *àrọ̀* texts, whenever they are cited in the genre participants (largely children and young people) are nevertheless made aware of the existence and importance of these objects of worship.

A song-riddle may also be used as a vehicle for propaganda (i.e., reflecting and molding public opinion) or an outlet for hurt feelings. For instance, the song-riddle text below adeptly manipulates the Yorùbá lampoon tradition, underscoring the futility of rejecting worship of the *òrìṣà* in favor of Christianity or Islam (referred to as religions of the "white man"):

Text 4

LEADER: *Mo rí ẹyẹ kan he.*
GROUP: *Olenle.*

Leader: *'Gúnnugun ní ẹyẹ òun ni.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Àkàlà lẹ́yẹ òun ni.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo mú'yẹ̀ẹ́, mo gbé e f'ọ́lọ́kọ́.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Ọlọ́kọ́ fún mi l'ọ́kọ́ kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo m'ọ́kọ́, mo gbé e f'álágbẹ̀.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Alágbẹ̀ fún mi n'íṣu kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo múṣu, mo gbé e f'óníyán.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Oníyán fún mi n'íyán kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo mú'yán, mo gbé e f'ọ́lọ́bẹ̀.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Ọlọ́bẹ̀ fún mi lọ́bẹ̀ kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo m'ọ́bẹ̀, mo gbé e f'éléwé.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Eléwé fún mi léwé kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo m'éwé, mo gbé e f'ólóbì.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Olóbì fún mi lóbì kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo m'óbì, mo fi f'órìṣà.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Òrìṣà fún mi l'ọ́mọ kan.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo mọ́mọ, mo gbé f'óyìnbó.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Òyìnbó m'úyùn fún mi wá.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Mo m'úyùn, mo gbé e f'ádìẹ.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Adìẹ gbéyùn fékòló.*
Group: *Olenle.*
Leader: *Ekòló gb'éyùn wọlẹ̀ lọ.*

GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: *A ó para wa láyò.*
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: *A ó para wa láyò.*
GROUP: *Olenle.*[13]
(LEADER: I saw a bird and took it.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The Vulture said it is her bird.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The Ground Hornbill said it is her bird.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: I plucked the feather of the bird; I gave it to the hoe owner.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The hoe owner gave me one hoe.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: I took the hoe, I gave it to a farmer.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The farmer gave me one yam tuber.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: I harvested the yam tuber; I gave it to the yam pounder.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The pounder gave me pounded yam.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: (When) I received the pounded yam; I gave it to the stew owner.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The stew owner gave me some stew.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: (When) I took the stew; I gave it to the one who sells leaves.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The one who sells leaves gave me one leaf.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: (When) I took the leaf; I gave it to the kola nuts vendor.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The kola nuts vendor gave me one kola nut.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: (When) I took the kola nut; I gave it to *òrìṣa*.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The *òrìṣà* gave me a child.

GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: (When) I took the child; I gave him/her to the white man.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The white man gave me coral beads.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: I gave the coral beads to the hen.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The hen gave the coral beads to the earthworm.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: The earthworm hid the coral beads under the earth.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: This is a stiff competition already.
GROUP: *Olenle.*
LEADER: This is a stiff competition already.
GROUP: *Olenle.)*

In this song-riddle text, the composer (author) is criticizing Yorùbá people who abandon worship of indigenous divinities (the *òrìṣà*) to embrace foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam. These people are criticized for freely "giving their children away" to the "white man" and for accepting objects of lesser value (such as coral beads) in exchange. In other words, this song is a type of exposé calling attention to immoral behaviors detrimental to the society's health and survival.

Relationship of Àrọ̀ Song-Riddle to Other Genres of Oral Performance

Àrọ̀ song-riddles are integrated into traditional Yorùbá gatherings that target a young person's cultural, moral, and linguistic development. A sterling example of this is the children's moonlight meetings. The practice of telling moonlight stories in Yorùbá society dates back to ancient times. The Yorùbá have been primarily an agrarian people; storytelling filled a traditional arts vacuum at the end of one's demanding workday. Today, as before, the appreciative audience is comprised of family members and/or children from the neighborhood. When moonlight meetings begin, texts of *àrọ̀* song-riddles are usually recited from memory. These brainteasers or "warm up" prepare children for the storytelling component—storytelling being regarded as the most important segment of the evening. Adults recite *àrọ̀* not only in a teaching capacity at these

meetings (focusing on moral virtues practiced by well-respected members of the community) but also as sympathisers, when visiting with and comforting children of mourners during times of bereavement. In this last example, therefore, the purpose of the *àrọ̀* recitations is to cheer children in their grief.

The *àrọ̀* song-riddles are also used to introduce Yorùbá children to other forms of oral performance, such as *oríkì* (praise names/poetry). Yorùbá *oríkì* are equivalents to names and are seen as being in some way key to a subject's essential nature. According to Karin Barber (1984)

> By uttering a subject's *oríkì*, one is calling upon or unlocking hidden powers; the activity of naming is thought of as being effectual. Human subjects react to the utterance of their *oríkì* with deep gratification and with an enhancement of their aura which is sometimes actually visible in their physical behavior…*Oríkì* are—or are made up of—a number of separate units, accumulated over time and referring to qualities or events associated with the subject but usually otherwise unrelated. In the case of an individual's *oríkì*, the units are accumulated over a time…New ones can be created, by drummers…at wide intervals as new topics arise, and these will then be added to the already existing collection…The units of *oríkì* are separate not only because they were separately composed to refer to unrelated events but also because each unit may make a different kind of reference. Since *oríkì* are characteristically cryptic and obscure; the hearer, to understand them, needs to know the separate background story of each one. (503–505)

The excerpt below, which forms the conclusion of Text 3 cited earlier, is more of an *oríkì* chant than *àrọ̀* song-riddle:

LEADER: *Pẹ́lẹ̀ o, aládéomi!*
Ọmọ òjorìgì-jorìgì.
Ọmọ Ṣadélórí.
Ṣedélórí, ọmọ ìwáṣẹ̀.
Ìwáṣẹ̀, baba ayé.
Baba ayé, ọkọ Wúràọ́lá.
Wúràọ́lá, ọmọ Àgbìgbò.
Àgbìgbò, ọmọ Páàrì.
Ò bá jẹ́ ta mí ṣèré-sèré.
Bóyá mo jẹ́ wá wò ọ́.

N bá wá wò ọ́ ná.
Kí n tó bomi fẹ́yẹ wẹ̀.
Ẹ̀hìn èyí ni ǹ bá tó bú'mọ̀ọ́.
Ìmọ́ ọmọ àrọ̀.
Àrọ̀ọ̀ mi, àrọ̀ yéè!
Tàìrí irọ́ pa kọ́.
Ló ń mú mi dá àrọ̀.
Tàìróríkì kì kọ́,
Ló mu mi ki Olódò Aládé omi.
Bí kò ṣe ti Àgbọnnìrègún,
Àgbọnnìrègún,
Tí ń pọ̀jọ́ ikú dà roro, dà roro.
Bú mi kí n já'mọ̀ọ́ rẹ.
Ọmọ onírọ́.

(LEADER: I hail you, ruler of the water!
The offspring of *Òjorìgì-jorìgì.*
Offspring of *Ṣadélóri.*
Ṣadélóri, the offspring of *ìwáṣẹ̀.*
Ìwáṣẹ̀, lord of the world.
Lord of the world, master of *Wúràọ̀lá.*
Wúràọ̀lá, offspring of *Àgbìgbò.*
Àgbìgbò, offspring of *Pàárì.*
You might just sting me playfully.
Maybe I would come and visit you.
I would have come to visit first.
Before [your visit] I would have said that I want to bathe the bird.
It is only after this that I can participate in *ìmọ́* riddle game.
Ìmọ́ riddle game, offspring of puzzles.
My riddle game, hail the puzzles!
It is not in want of falsehood.
That has made me create riddles.
It is not in want of appraisal of praises,
That made me salute the ruler of the sea.
If not for *Àgbonnìrègún,*
Àgbọnnìrègún,
Who distorts the day of death severely.
Insult me and see if I will not disprove your *ìmọ́* riddle game.
Offspring of liar.)

In their performances, Yorùbá oral artists customarily combine songs and chants that are usually accompanied by some form of musical regulation (instruments beaten or plucked at regular intervals) or rhythmic background (such as humming or a clear division of statements by breath-groups). Chanting is an oral performance technique bridging normal speech and song. Kwabena Nketia (1963) refers to chanting as "half spoken and half sung" (29). This close relationship to song can be seen in the reciter's striving after musical effect in the balance between stresses (high and low) at various points in the performance. As compared to chanting, singing is characterized by the highest degree of musicality (both vocal and instrumental) and by other aspects of performance (e.g., audience participation). The most significant aspect of the switch from *àrọ̀* song-riddle to *oríkì* praise poetry (chant) is that it expresses the fluidity of forms that characterize Yorùbá oral performance. Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1984) suggests that *oríkì* contributes to several other forms of Yorùbá oral performance, including *ìjálá*, *rárà, ẹkún ìyàwó, ẹ̀sà egúngún*, and even *ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ ifá*. No wonder that another scholar, Olúdáre Ọlájubù (1977) recognized *oríkì* as the centerpiece or "essence" of Yorùbá oral performance.

At times Yorùbá oral artists weave the structure of *àrọ̀* into their performance of *oríkì*, most especially the lineage poetry (*oríkì orílẹ̀*). In contrast to other forms of *oríkì*, lineage poetry (*oríkì orílẹ̀*) is descriptive poetry; that is, it describes the place of origin of its bearers. Indeed, its primary focus is the geographic place of origin and the distinctive attributes of the place and its people. *Oríkì orílẹ̀* is one of the principal means by which groups of people who regard themselves as kin recognize each other and assert their unity. It alludes to illustrious male and female ancestors, but these allusions are singularly attached to the notion of the town of origin. In her groundbreaking work on this subject, Karin Barber (1991) states that "*oríkì orílẹ̀* do not trace genealogies, nor do they revolve around the notion of a lineage founder; rather they tell each individual where he or she belongs in the community: they establish the individual on the social map, and give him or her a background without which he or she would scarcely exist as a social being" (166). Barber argues further that *orílẹ̀* have a dual claim on people's emotional loyalties: they relate them to their source and, through their source, to large numbers of people all over Yorùbáland. *Orílẹ̀* place individuals in an immediate, concrete social context within their own town or community, thus assigning them a social place and body of people to whom they belong, and who

belong to them. Barber provides us with a concise description of this subject matter when she writes:

> People from the same place of origin—the same *orílẹ̀*—say, "We are one." When they meet…they recognise an obligation to help each other, and observe a prohibition on intermarriage. They have a number of things in common. They share certain food taboos, special funeral customs, a particular *òrìṣà* or a *specialised occupation* [my emphasis]…all of which are traced back to the town of origin. But the most important thing they have in common is the *oríkì orílẹ̀* themselves. (166)

One of the Yorùbá lineages mentioned regularly in *àrọ̀* song-riddle is the Òpómúléró. According to Adébóyè Babalọlá (1966), Aláàfin Gàán-Ojíṣẹ́ (who instituted the Òpómúléró lineage in Old Ọ̀yọ́) "had extensive farm plots planted solely with cotton, which yielded raw material for the production of loom-woven cloths of different patterns and textures for use in his palace. He was fond of wearing gorgeous robes and often made reference to the importance of clothing for the enhancement of the appearance of every human being" (34). The following *àrọ̀* song-riddle excerpt provides detailed information as to the contribution of the Òpómúléró lineage's "specialized occupation" to Yorùbá social and economic life. The text notates different stages in the cultivation of cotton and loom weaving; it also alludes to the roles of cotton farmers, cotton sellers, loom weavers, and seamstresses in traditional Yorùbá society.

Ọmọ, bí òǹpa kò pa, emi lòǹkọ ó kọ?
Bóǹkọ ò kọ, emi lòǹgbìn ó gbìn?
Bóǹgbìn ò gbìn, emi lòǹhù ó hù?
Bóǹhù ò hù, emi lòǹro ó ro?
Bóǹro ò ro, emi lòǹso ó so?
Bóǹso ò so, emi lòǹlà ó là?
Bóǹlà ò là, emi lòǹyọ, ó yọ?
Bóǹyọ ò yọ, emi lòǹtà ó tà?
Bóǹtà ò tà, emi lòǹrà ó rà?
Bóǹrà ò rà, emi lòǹràn ó ran?
Bóǹran ò ran, emi lòǹhun ó hun?
Bóǹhun ò hun, emi lòǹhun ó tà?
Bóǹhun ò tà, emi lòǹrà ó rà?

Bóńrà ò rà, emi lònwọ̀ ó wọ̀?
Bóńwọ̀ ò wọ̀, emi là bá rí fi bòdí?
Ọmọ, ẹlòmíràn ìbá bọ́ra sílẹ̀, a jọ̀bọ.
Ọmọ, ẹlòmíràn ìbá bọ́ra sílẹ̀ a jọ̀màdò.
Ọmọ, ẹlòmíràn ìbá bọ́ra sílẹ̀, a tẹ̀ kunnugba.[14]
(Child, if the farmer does not plow (the farm field), how would the ridges be made?
If the farmer does not make the ridges, how would the planter plant?
If the planter does not plant, would anything germinate?
If nothing germinates, would there be a need for the farmer to remove the weeds?
If the farmer does not remove the weeds, would the plants produce flowers?
If there is no flowering, would there be any budding (to produce the cotton)?
If there is no budding, would there be any cotton for the farmer to pick?
If there is nothing to pick, would there be anything to sell?
If the seller does not sell, would there be anything to buy or purchase?
If the buyer does not purchase, would there be anything to spin?
If the spinner does not spin, would there be anything to weave?
If the weaver does not weave, would there be anything for the weaver to sell?
If the weaver does not sell, would there be anything for the buyer to purchase?
If the buyer does not purchase, would there be anything for people to wear (as cloth)?
If there is nothing to wear, would there be anything to cover nakedness?
Child, some would look like the monkey when naked.
Child, some would look like the bush-pig when naked.
Child, some would look old and bent when naked.)

By adopting the structure of *àrọ̀* song-riddle in the delivery of this excerpt of *oríkì orílẹ̀*, the oral artist is able to achieve a number of things: (i) identify the "specialized occupation" of the person being praised as cotton farmer and loom weaver; (ii) itemize the separate stages that culminate in production of fabrics, that is: plowing the field (making ridges on which to plant cotton seeds), removing weeds to ensure a

good harvest, ensuring the flowering of cotton in readiness for production, picking dry cotton from the field, spinning raw cotton into threads, weaving thread on the loom, producing the fabric, selling the fabric at market, and purchasing of fabric by community members to make their clothing; (iii) comment on the social necessity of loom weavers as producers of fabrics that people in the community use in making dresses to cover their nakedness; and (iv) laud the contribution of cotton farmers and loom weavers to the socioeconomic well-being of their society.

From the foregoing, therefore, one may conclude with some certainty that, in spite of the increasing complexities of modern societies and frenetic promotion of a global monotone culture, the intellectual and social development of a child essentially takes place in specific cultural environments—and every culture has a built-in system of survival evident in the way its children are socialized. Culture consists of the ideas, customs, and arts that are produced and shared by a particular society. The salient aspects of a culture are coded in tradition—customs or beliefs that people in a particular group or society have practiced and adhered to for a significant period of time.

When children are socialized, they are taught how society is organized and are encouraged to behave in ways that are culturally acceptable. The socialization of children into particular cultures or societies involves the use of a specific language—language being the lifeblood of any culture. Furthermore, since the indigenous language is used in the creation of all forms of literature, then literature irrefutably becomes the most potent weapon for ensuring cultural continuity, vitality, and morality. For example, when an adult issues verbal threats to a Yorùbá child about how important it is not to steal, those threats pale in comparison to singing that same child a song-riddle on the topic of theft such as the following:

Kí ni n ó folè ṣe láyé tí mo wá?
Kí ni n ó folè ṣe láyé tí mo wá?
Láyé tí mo wá, kàkà kí n jalè,
Kàkà kí n jalè, ma kúkú dẹrú.
Kí ni n ó folè ṣe láyé tí mo wá?
Ẹni tó jalè á délé ẹjọ́.
Ẹni tó jalè á délé ẹjọ́.
Adájọ́ á wá fẹ̀wọ̀n sí i lẹ́sẹ̀;
Fẹ̀wọ̀n sí i lẹ́sẹ̀ bí olúùgbẹ́.
Ẹni tó jalè á délé ẹjọ́.

Bẹ́ni tó jalè bá lọ́lá láyé,
Bẹ́ni tó jalè bá lọ́lá láyé,
Bó lọ́lá láyé, kò lè rọ́run wọ̀;
Kò lè rọ́run wọ̀ bọ́lọ́jọ́ bá dé.
Bẹ́ni tó jalè bá lọ́lá láyé.
Ẹ yé, ẹ má bólè ṣe, ẹgbẹ́ tí mo ní.
Ẹ yé, ẹ má bólè ṣe, ẹgbẹ́ tí mo ní.
Ẹgbẹ́ tí mo ní, èwọ̀n kò sunwọ̀n.
Èwọ̀n kò sunwọ̀n fọ́mọlúwàbí.
Ẹ yé, ẹ má bólè ṣe, ẹgbẹ́ tí mo ní.
Olúwa má folè ṣe ẹni tí a ní.
Olúwa má folè ṣe ẹni tí a ní.
Ọmọ tí a ní, kànràn kó jalè,
Kànràn kójalè, bó bá kú ó tọ́.
Olúwa má folè ṣe ẹni tí a ní.[15]
(Why would I steal?
Why would I steal?
Rather than steal,
I would be a slave.
Why would I steal?
Anyone who steals will be charged to court.
Anyone who steals will be charged to court.
The judge will imprison him or her;
Chain his or her legs like that of an animal.
Anyone who steals will be charged to court.
If anyone becomes rich by stealing,
If anyone becomes rich by stealing,
And receives earthly honor, he or she will end in hell;
(And) will not make heaven upon his or her death.
If anyone becomes rich by stealing.
Please, have nothing to do with pilfering, my friends.
Please, have nothing to do with pilfering, my friends.
My friends, prison is a terrible experience.
Prison is not the ideal place for a well-behaved person.
Please, have nothing to do with pilfering, my friends.
God, keep our loved one from pilfering.
God, keep our loved one from pilfering.
Rather than for our loved one to steal,
Let him or her die.
God, keep our loved one from pilfering.)

Thus, the intellectual and social development of children involves their ability to understand and cope with ideas and information in a rapidly changing world. The advantages of using song-riddle in the process of socialization, as is the Yorùbá custom, cannot be overstated.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Current Trends in the Use of Enigmatic Forms

Enigmatic forms such as regular riddles, song-riddles, tale-riddles, and puzzles are all important aspects of Yorùbá oral literary production. These genres have expanded from their original domain of orality to other territories—including modern literature, the media, popular culture, and the Internet. The manner in which oral literature and folklore continue to exude vitality in modern-day society is one of the primary concerns of this chapter.

Generally speaking, innovativeness, flexibility, and adaptation are integral aspects of Yorùbá verbal art. A salient feature of Yorùbá riddles, puzzles, and other related enigmatic forms is that they are the cultural property of the people. As folk culture, they "belong" to the people and are available for utilization by any member of the community. This communal aspect has made these forms pliant and adaptable to a variety of time periods and occasions.

Semiotic innovation and the updating of images in enigmatic forms are perhaps as old as the genres themselves. According to Marcel Danesi (1999),

> while metaphor is the *semantic glue* that holds conceptual systems together, it is also the source of innovation in such systems…This is why *novel metaphors* are being created all the time…For this metaphor to gain currency, however, it must capture the fancy of many other people for a period of time. Then and only then will its novelty have become worn out and will it become the basis for a new conceptual metaphor…The ability to coin new metaphors

> allows people not only to produce new concepts, but also to fill-in "knowledge gaps" in a creative, yet intellectually effortless, fashion. (104–105, emphases in original)

Oral artists have always been free to adapt their art not only ideologically but also structurally or with respect to content. In the case of regular riddles, for instance, while new ones are being created on a daily basis, obsolete images in old riddles are also being updated—either to demonstrate their contemporary application or to modernize and better align these images with contemporary usage. Such image modernization has always been peripheral to the form or theme of the riddles in which it occurs. The essential objective of image modernization is to make riddles relevant to the audience's social reality.

This chapter also examines the impact of these popular folk traditions on the writing of contemporary authors. In discussing this singular cultural matrix that contemporary writers appropriate toward their literary works, I argue that while some writers borrow verbatim from (and therefore literally preserve) different types of enigmatic forms, others freely adjust the transferred folkloric materials to raise social consciousness in the minds of their readers—thereby freeing the oral material from impediments of a fixed cultural perspective. These creative strategies comprise an important segment of this chapter, given their relationship to new riddles in contemporary context, modern-day urban tale-riddles, and the transformation of enigmatic modes in modern literature, the media, popular culture, and the Internet.

New Riddles in Contemporary Context

Regular riddles are rather concise expressions, making them particularly easy to reproduce in almost word-perfect form or order. Regular riddles are time-honored expressions and, although the situations in which they are used may be similar, each individual performance is "recreated," and therefore unique. Scholars disagree as to whether riddles exercise the intellect; some also question the riddle's potential for originality. Scholars like John Blacking (1961) and Lee Haring (1974) do not credit the riddle with any creative or intellectual quality while others (such as Isaac Schapera, 1932; William Bascom, 1949; Lyndon Harries, 1976; Ian Hamnett, 1967; J. L. Kallen and C. M. Eastman, 1979) concede that riddles train the mind and allow room for some originality both in the choice of alternative answers to propositions and even in the creation of new riddles. "Every

time a riddle is posed," Lyndon Harries (1976) tells us, "it is posed as if for the first time" (319). Surely the emphasis here seems to be on improvisation or formulation of riddles, a process that is not entirely obvious.

Bits of information are often embedded in contemporary riddles, offering clues as to when the riddles were first introduced. These are usually references to historical events or personalities—and sometimes to objects associated with historical developments, such as the introduction of nonindigenous religions into a culture (Christianity or Islam, for instance). Other examples might include items associated with shifting demographics; that is, the arrival of foreign peoples. Riddles that incorporate historical markers permit an approximate determination of their age. Any event referred to in a riddle obviously predates it, and one that concerns a historical figure probably originated during that individual's lifetime or soon afterward. The following riddle is a good example:

Ẹgbẹ̀rún-un ***sọ́jà*** *ń yan lọ sógun, ẹnìkankan kò si gbọ́ ìró ẹsẹ̀ wọn.*
(A thousand **soldiers** marching to the battlefront, but no one heard their footsteps.)

The riddle's correct solution is the word *eèrùn* (soldier ants—a type of brown ant that moves together in thousands, lining up and crossing footpaths throughout the day biting unsuspecting passersby who carelessly step on them). The mention of *sọ́jà* (soldier) in the riddle shows that the riddle was created during or after the establishment of British institutions in Nigeria. One may further narrow the timeframe by suggesting that the riddle postdates the establishment of the Royal West African Frontier Force by the British colonial authorities in 1900—and the recruitment of local soldiers into its ranks.[1] Another riddle containing historical markers is the following:

Àgbà ìmàle tó wé ọmọ rẹ̀ ni láwàní.
(A devout *Muslim* that *turbans* his child, or son.)

The correct answer to this riddle is *erín àgbàdo* (corn or maize cob, still in the husk). This riddle provides two separate historical markers: the mention of *ìmàle* which, in this context, refers to a fervent practitioner of Islam and, second, *láwàní* (turban), a man's cotton or silk headdress, wound around a cap or head, and usually worn by Muslims. This riddle could not have predated the Islamic era in Yorùbáland; that is, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (during the reign of Mansa Kankan Musa of the Malian Empire) by which time the Yorùbá came into contact with

Islam. According to the scholar Paulo Farias (1990), the first Yorùbáland mosque was built in Ọ̀yọ́-Ilé (Old Ọ̀yọ́) in 1550 AD. However, the Yorùbá people did not convert to Islam at that time. Rather, the mosque catered to foreign Muslims traveling or living in the region. Inexorably, Islam spread to other Yorùbá towns, including Ìwó where a mosque was built in 1655, then Ìṣẹ́yìn, 1760; Lagos, 1774; Ṣakí, 1790; and Òṣogbo, 1889.[2] In time, Islam spread to a number of Yorùbá towns, including present day Ọ̀yọ́, Ìbàdàn, Abẹ́òkúta, Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde, Ìkìrun and Ẹdẹ.

Other riddles with historical markers, specifically those with references to the presence of Europeans in Yorùbáland, include the following:

Ọ̀gọ́rùún ọlọ́pàá, bẹ́lìtì kan ṣoṣo.
(One hundred *policemen* [strapped/adorned] with only one *belt*.)

The answer to this riddle is *òṣùṣù ọwọ̀* (a broom or sweeping apparatus made from multiple palm fronds bound together with cord or string). With its reference to police wearing a belt (a mode of dress common to the police of colonial Nigeria), this riddle could not have been created earlier than 1861. At that time the British Consul in Lagos established the first Consular Guard, a police force comprised of 30 men. The Guard was further regularized in 1879 by an ordinance creating a Constabulary for the Colony of Lagos.[3] Yet another riddle containing similar references is the following, the solution to which is *ìrẹ̀* (the cricket, an insect):

Ọlọ́pàá *kúkúrú di tái wọlé.*
(The short *policeman* dressed in *necktie*.)

Apart from referring to the police, the riddle incidentally refers to a European mode of dress, the necktie, commonly worn by British colonial officers in Nigeria.

The following riddle with *àkekèé* (scorpion) as its answer refers to both a historical figure and to an historical event in Yorùbáland:

Aláìlórí ọmọ-ogun Ògúnmọ́lá,
Aláìlátàrí ọmọ-ogun Ìbàdàn,
O lọ́wọ́, kò fi jagun;
Ìdí ló fi ń jà.
(The headless fighter of Ògúnmọ́lá,
The beheaded fighter of Ìbàdàn,
S/he has hands but does not use it in battle;
S/he fights with her/his buttocks.)

This riddle most certainly originated in the nineteenth century during or after the 1860–1885 Yorùbá Ìjàyè war and the lifetime of General Ògúnmọ́lá, the great Ìbàdàn warlord. Ògúnmọ́lá led the army of King Adélù, the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́ in the Aláàfin's conflict with Kúrunmí of Ìjàyè and his Ègbá ally. This event is recorded in the works of several historians: Adébánjí Akíntóyè (1971), Tóyìn Fálọlá and G. O. Ògúntómisìn (2001), Samuel Johnson (1921), and so on. According to these historical records, several soldiers on both sides of the conflict were beheaded. It was also claimed, albeit falsely, that Ògúnmọ́lá won the war simply because some of those soldiers continued fighting even after having been beheaded!

The precise extent to which these new riddles may be dated is limited, however. If one does not exercise sufficient caution on that score, one can occasionally make significant errors. A good example is the inclusion of *búrẹ́dì* (bread) in the following riddle that has *ẹyìn* (palm nuts) as the answer or solution.

Mo ju búrẹ́dì sẹ́nu mo jẹ ẹ́.
Mo ju òkúta wẹ́wẹ̀wẹ́ sẹ́nu; mo mì ín.
Mo ju labòòtóró sẹ́nu,
Kò ṣeé gbé mì.
Kí ni o?
(I put *bread* in my mouth; I was able to eat it.
I put stone pebbles in my mouth; I swallow it.
But when I put this unknown thing in my mouth,
I could not swallow it.
What is it?)

Similar attempts have been made to date a Yorùbá proverb, in which the generic word "bread" appears:

Aláàárù tó ń jẹ búrẹ́dì,
Awọ orí rẹ̀ ló ń jẹ tí ò mọ̀,
(The head porter who eats *bread*,
Is unconciously eating the scalp off his head);

Dúpẹ́ Odùyọyè (1996) argues that the proverb "dates [from] about 1850—[date of the] first contact of the Yorùbá with wheat bread and the English word 'bread'…It was fashionable but more expensive than the local staples." Odùyọyè's dating suggests that the proverb's appearance immediately followed the introduction of wheat bread into the Yorùbá world. He does say "*about* 1850," but how flexible is the word "about" in

this instance? In fact, all we can say, in the absence of any more specific evidence, is that both riddle and proverb originated at some point *after* the introduction of wheat to the Yorùbá world.

On occasion, images to which correct dating may be linked are not necessarily in the riddle statement itself but rather in the solution or answer. The following examples demonstrate this phenomenon:

Wúndíá arẹwà kan, bí ó ti dára tó ko ṣe é gbé wọ yàrá.
Kí ni o?
[Answer: *Ọkọ̀ ayọ́kẹ́lẹ́/mọ́tò*]
(The beautiful lady that cannot be taken into the bedroom.
What is it? [Answer: Automobile/car])

Àkùkọ baba mi kan láéláé,
Àkùkọ baba mi kan làèlàè;
Owó níí jẹ, kì í jẹ àgbàdo.
[Answer: *Kóòtù / ilé-ẹjọ́]*
(My father's rooster,
My father's rooster;
He doesn't eat grains but money. [Answer: The court of law])

Ọ̀rọ̀ àlọ́ kan láéláé,
Ọ̀rọ̀ àlọ́ kan làèlàè;
Bó ṣe pẹ́ láyé sí, bẹ́ẹ̀ ló ń kúrú sí i.
Kí ni o? [Answer: *Àbẹ́là/káńdù*]
(There is this old creature in the riddle,
There is this old creature in the riddle;
The older s/he is, the shorter s/he becomes.
What is it? [Answer: Wax candle])

Ọmọ ìyá mẹ́ta sùn tira wọn lórí ẹní,
Ṣùgbọ́n wọn kò fara kanra wọn.
Kí ni o? [Answer: *Abẹ fáànù*]
(Three siblings lay on the same mat,
Without one touching the other.
What is it? [Answer: Fan blades])[4]

Atiláawí kò mọ ara rẹ̀ lágbà;
Ojoojúmọ́ ló ń ka ọjọ́. [Answer: *Kàlẹ́ńdà*]

(This being doesn't know that s/he has advanced in age;
S/he counts her/his age every day. [Answer: Calendar])

Baba kékeré kìkì àròyé;
Bí baba kékeré bá sọ̀rọ̀, kì í gbọ́ ti ẹlòmíràn. [Answer: *Rédíò*]
(The talkative old man;
When he talks, he doesn't listen to others. [Answer: Radio])

Adéfúnkẹ́ dára lọ́mọbìnrin, ṣùgbọ́n kò ní ìfun nínú. [Answer: *Bọ́ọ̀lù*]
(Adéfúnkẹ́ is a beautiful lady, but she has no intestine. [Answer: Soccer ball])

Contemporary Urban Tale-Riddles

Postcolonial Nigeria seems highly fertile territory for folk stories, especially those alluding to the political and economic behavior of people in, and surrounded by, power. These modern-day stories are excellent examples of the reutilization and adaptation of tale-riddling; specifically, tale-riddling that has as its objective modern experiments in hegemonic politics. In bars, restaurants, on buses, at parties, even in offices and political meetings, Yorùbá people enjoy tale-riddling clothed in contemporary images. A major iconographic shift in this class of modern tale-riddles is the absence of animal characters, especially the tortoise (the traditional protagonist in Yorùbá tale-riddles, as discussed in chapter three). Instead, the characters are primarily human. This new genre of stories, according to Rọ́pò Ṣekoní (1994), started circulating in Yorùbá urban centers during the corrupt civilian administration of 1979–1983 and has steadily gained popularity—especially given growing levels of socioeconomic uncertainty threatening the material wellbeing of the people.

One of the most widely circulated urban tale-riddles is the story entitled "How a Rice Dealer Turned Sand Dealer." The story goes like this: a member of the ruling political party who lost an election in his home state was awarded, by way of compensation, the contract to import and sell such basic life-sustaining items as rice, milk, and sugar.[5] After clearing his goods at the Lagos seaport, the contractor hired some (otherwise unemployed) individuals to move the materials into steel structures, where the goods were to remain—hoarded until such time that they would attract higher prices in the market. The politician

turned rice contractor also succeeded in convincing the government to provide him a police escort, as well as protection during and after the transfer of goods to the hoarding locale. The businessman, who did not trust the policemen posted to serve as security guards for his warehouse, also hired some local residents, whom he paid to spy on the "greedy-looking policemen." After hoarding the goods for about six months, the contractor decided to release them for sale at a time when thousands of people had to queue for rice and sugar. Three days before opening his warehouse to retailers, the contractor dispensed with the services of the local residents he had paid to keep an eye on the police. He also warned and bribed the police (after dismissing the unofficial plainclothes guards) to ensure that none of the "hungry-looking lazy local miscreants" would be allowed within a hundred yards of the warehouse. On the day he opened his warehouse to retailers, the bags of rice and sugar appeared intact. Shortly after retailers bought all the rice and sugar, many of them returned to complain that the bags had actually contained sand. The politician turned businessman later realized that a huge tunnel had been dug from a nearby bush to his warehouse. It was through this tunnel that the bags of rice and sugar had been replaced with sand. He angrily questioned the policemen on duty; they responded that no one had been spotted within one hundred yards of the warehouse. As soon as the contractor drove off, depressed and threatening to make the divisional police office account for this, the policemen laughed heartily, shook each other's hand, and referred to the contractor as a "foolish man."[6]

This modern-day urban tale-riddle exposes the masses' disgust for the greed of the propertied class. Using the dialectical image of the struggle between the dominator (the socially privileged) and the resister (the socially marginalized), the story attempts to problem solve at the symbolic level in favor of the underdog, as is characteristic of the group of tales Ṣekoní (1994) refers to as the "traditional tale of negation" (27). The solidarity, or collusion, between two sets of underdog characters—the police and the unemployed, hired and fired at whim by the rice contractor—is reminiscent of the solidarity between Tortoise and Woodpecker (discussed earlier in chapter three). Both mirror the paradigm of deliberate impoverishment of the socially disadvantaged by the political and social élite. One recalls the Tortoise's attempt to mock the three princesses' class arrogance by purposefully entering a riddle competition for potential suitors.

Another contemporary urban tale-riddle that references the theme of social inversion is entitled "How a Driver Outplayed his Boss." In this

story, an elected state governor asks his driver to deliver some cartons of beer to his father; the father lives in his native village about one hundred miles from the state capitol. The governor gives the driver a tip, bids him a safe journey, and patronizingly pats him on the back. The driver is surprised at his boss' uncharacteristic generosity and friendliness; indeed, his boss usually barks orders and is habitually stingy. The driver becomes curious about the nature of the errand he is running. Midway between the capitol and village, the driver stops to check the cargo, loaded into the trunk by the governor himself. He finds that the four cartons are actually bursting with new currency notes. Quickly driving to *his* native village, the driver stashes the money in his mother's hut, then fills the cartons with bottles of beer and proceeds to deliver them to the governor's father. The driver quickly reports back to his boss that the beer has been safely delivered. A few days later, the governor's father sends his governor-son a thank you note for the beer, asking why he did not send whiskey (his favorite drink) instead. The governor quickly summons his driver who swears that he delivered exactly what he found in the trunk—cartons of beer.

The driver is dismissed, only to be arrested a short while later for reckless driving. While in custody, his house is thoroughly searched but no incriminating evidence is found. Charges are later dropped, although both the driver's house and his parents' house in the village are searched periodically for several months. These searches turn up nothing. In time the driver relocates to his parent's village, becomes a farmer and, unlike before, successfully clothes and feeds his seven children, as well as sending them all to excellent private schools in the city. His wife becomes a successful businessperson. Meanwhile, the governor and his secret agents continue monitoring the driver's lifestyle. Quite unexpectedly, however, a military coup takes place, the governor is arrested and thrown in jail on corruption charges.[7]

This contemporary urban tale-riddle focuses on the reversal of a corrupt political ethos that ordinarily exploits and victimizes ordinary working-class people. Similar to the Tortoise in traditional Yorùbá folktales, the driver serves the role of trickster, achieving a just and equitable outcome for the underdog—even though the odds are clearly stacked against him. The driver is depicted as a wily individual willing to take major risks to make an unfair system answerable to his needs. The driver's appropriation of the governor's loot (with impunity) is a way of using urban tale-riddles to call attention to the need for social reform, allowing the masses to dispossess (if only symbolically) the exploiters and distribute the nation's wealth more equitably. In several of the urban tale-riddles

that surfaced during my field research, dual themes became clear: antagonism rages between the socioeconomically élite and the citizens they exploit, and there is always an underlying desire by the latter to avenge inequities at the expense of the former.

Also, it may be argued that many other contemporary urban tale-riddles are created merely for entertainment and amusement rather than to be serious discussions of socioeconomic or political issues. One Yorùbá storyteller/writer renowned for his humorous tale-riddling is Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá, the author of a collection of stories entitled *Fàbú: Àkójọpọ̀ Àwàdà*. Ìṣòlá has been described by Gbóyèga Àlàbá (2008) as a writer who "creates comic situations, recreates comic episodes which he has learned or experienced, and makes vivid and humorous descriptions of pathetic situations in his creative works" (62). Àlàbá identifies the major sources of humor in Ìṣòlá's works as "comic episodes, witty comments, and suggestions of laughter" (63). In the collection of stories cited above, Ìṣòlá aims solely at amusing his readers, who would have been his listeners had he been telling the stories in person. For example, in the story entitled "Aádámù àti Éfâ," Ìṣòlá creates comic effect when retelling the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He does this by using the story to "resolve the riddle" behind the name and naming of the Yorùbá town, Àsùnmọ́:

At this present time, there is no one who does not know that the city of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ is the cradle of the world. Whoever does not know ranks among the living dead. Ilé-Ifẹ̀ was where the said Garden of Eden was first situated. The space that occupies the present palace of the Ọ̀ọ̀ni Àdìmúlà of Ifẹ̀ was the center of the Garden. That was the place God created for Adam and Eve, and they were having a nice time living together without a care in the world! Eve was a very beautiful woman. She had ebony black and shining skin; she was slender, tall and a paragon of beauty! She had long hair that was well kept. Adam too was a powerfully built man. His arms and legs were heavily muscled, like a giant! His massive chest could be likened to that of Pharaoh whose heart was hardened. Adam was heavily bearded, tall and huge in stature. Adam and Eve ought to have been living in harmony but this was not so.

The Almighty God who created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden gave them several systems of rules and laws. One of the laws that Adam was most uncomfortable with was his inability to touch Eve, his beautiful wife. It was taboo for him to do so. That was the forbidden fruit for him. One day Adam sat down, deep in thought. He was moaning and groaning and said, "How can a silky soft-skinned woman be so radiant and yet I am forbidden from touching her? And I cannot even couple with

her? To think: she is supposed to be my wife! This temptation is getting beyond what I can handle! Why can't I touch her? How I wish that God himself might consider my plight! This so-called confinement does not augur well for me."

At that instance, Eve returned to the Garden and brought many different kinds of fruits. She met her husband, who was staring morosely with his chin in his hands. Eve asked Adam what the matter was. Adam answered, "I am not comfortable with this particular commandment that God gave us. It is getting on my nerves. I don't see the possibility of keeping it." Eve asked, "Which of the commandments is that?" Adam replied, "It is this commandment of not touching each other. Just look at the way you have braided your hair! How can I look at this and not be attracted to you?" Eve retorted, "What! Adam! You have been possessed by the devil. You had better ask for forgiveness for expressing such evil thoughts. The Almighty God has told us not to touch each other. I ask that you behave yourself! Don't involve me with your ill luck. We must not go against the commandments of God!" Adam replied, "A law that does not augur well with us shall be done away with, eventually. If the Almighty wants us to enjoy this beautiful Garden thoroughly, he should quickly abolish this bad commandment. If this is not done immediately, I will be forced to go against it. If God likes, let Him send me out of His Garden. A contented mind is more important than a beautiful Garden. Who cares about the stupid Garden?" Eve exclaimed: "What! How could you be saying this? It is best that your diabolical intensions be known now. Two people must not be tempted at the same time. As for me, I would not go against the Law of God. I'm sure you are being intoxicated by wine. May God forgive you! If you are being tormented by the devil, please count me out. I don't want any part of this!"

Adam was silent, looking at Eve lustfully. He couldn't take his eyes off her. He was admiring her radiant skin and her attractive carriage. Eve became highly suspicious. She had a feeling that an evil thought had invaded her husband's mind. She was watching Adam carefully. She kept the front door open in case of any eventuality. Eve gave fruit to Adam, but he refused to eat it. The rascal wanted a different kind of fruit. He began to make suggestive jokes and flatter Eve in order to arouse her sexual attention. However, Eve would not be fooled. Adam beckoned for Eve to come to him, but Eve refused. He tried every trick in the book but Eve would not budge! Adam now made up his mind to use some other tactics to seduce Eve. He realized that she was a smart and intelligent lady, but difficult to understand. He was determined to quickly grab Eve and defile her, but Eve was able to see through Adam's

evil thoughts, which were evident on his face. She was well armed and prepared.

Adam got up quickly and unexpectedly. He moved like a flash toward Eve and was about to catch her unawares, to make her fall on her back so that he could have carnal knowledge of her. Little did he know that he had met his match in her. She was up to the task and was as fast as a lightning! By the time Adam got to Eve, she had dodged him. Adam scrambled to the ground but caught nothing. He almost hit his chest on the floor! Before he could gather his wits about him, Eve had flown out! Adam was livid and resolved to deal with her. Eve was gone in a flash. She fled as quickly as possible. She still had the stamina and strength to do so. Apparently, she was still at a youthful age and could move quickly. It now dawned on Adam that this was no joking matter. It would be shameful if he didn't get hold of Eve that day. Adam pursued Eve. It was a heated race. They ran through forests, through bushes and fields, through deep ditches, through slippery terraced hillsides and cliffs, yet the marathon race continued. They kept on falling and rising. The hot pursuit continued.

Even when they got to Oníkẹ̀kẹ́ Village, Eve would not stop running. Adam was shocked to see that Eve could move as quickly as she did. They raced to a station that is known as Ọlọ́ọ́dẹ Garage today, yet Eve did not show any sign of fatigue. Now Adam was running angrily. They were conversing as they ran. Adam strongly advised Eve by saying, "You had better stop nearby so that we can settle this matter. I am going to catch up with you even if you fly!" Eve implored Adam, "You had better repent. Can't you see that what you are doing is devilish? Remember what Almighty God told us!" Adam's countenance was wild. He was beyond hearing anything. However, they kept up the hot chase! They arrived at Ilẹ̀ Tuntun, but Eve did not stop. They got to Òkè Ìgbẹ́ Eve did not look back and Adam did not give any respite.

After a while, Eve began to feel tired. Who would not feel tired? When Adam observed that Eve was exhausted, he became amused. "Can't you see your folly?" Eve's speed was diminishing. Her legs were hitting the ground heavily. Adam in his own case sped on like never before. After a while, Eve fell down. She was really exhausted. She began to squeal and was begging Adam to reconsider his thoughts and refrain from going against the commandment of God. Adam toppled over Eve, and was panting heavily. The two of them were perspiring profusely. Adam was quite tired, too. "Can you not see now? He who is being pursued by a masquerade should keep persevering; the attendant fatigue is reciprocal." Adam managed to talk. He said, "Can you see the problem you created

today, despite all the supplications I made to you to stop nearby and let us do what we needed to do?" Eve managed to reply to him, "I could not have waited because what you had in mind does not go well with the commandments that God gave us. I am still warning you now. It is the devil that is tempting you. Be reasonable and do not make me an enemy of God!" Adam held on to Eve and would not let her go. He said, "Now, I have you within my grasp. If you think what I'm about to do is devilish, I am okay and satisfied with that. Ever since I have been in the Garden of Eden, have I ever had this privilege?" At that instance, Adam grabbed Eve and defiled her. Eve could not struggle any longer because she was exhausted. Then the two of them slept.

Eve was the first to wake. She stretched out lazily and looked around her but could not fathom where she was. She gazed at Adam on the ground and looked at herself. Her mind flashed back to what had happened between them. She woke Adam quickly and asked him where they were. Adam too was looking around, extremely surprised and shocked. He couldn't get his bearing. They now realized that they had gone very far from the Garden of Eden in Ilé-Ifẹ̀. They noticed that not a single soul was living near the place where they were. Adam stood up and held Eve by the hand. He gazed into her eyes and said, "I am going to rename this place. We shall call it Àsùnmọ́ because it denotes the place I first had carnal knowledge of you." Eve agreed that it was a very suitable name. They hugged each other. Eve affirmed: "It is indeed Àsùnmọ́!"[8]

This story demonstrates Ìṣòlá's linguistic competence and his creative ability to manipulate language for humorous effect. For instance, when rounding off his story, Ìṣòlá manipulates two features of Yorùbá oral literature, wordplay and euphemism, to "decode" the riddle in the name Àsùnmọ́. According to him, the name is derived from *sún mọ́* (to sleep with, to make love to). Consider Adam's statement that, *èmi yóò sọ ibí yìí lórúkọ. A ó máa pè é ní Àsùnmọ́ nítorí pé ibẹ̀ ni mo ti kọ́kọ́ sún mọ́ ọ* (I am going to rename this place. We shall call it Àsùnmọ́ because it denotes the place I first had carnal knowledge of you). Here Ìṣòlá employs wordplay—"a juxtaposition of lexical items which are somehow similar in shape" (in this case, *sún mọ́* and *Àsùnmọ́*)—"to produce an effect of verbal dexterity" (Ọlátúnjí, 1984: 37). Ìṣòlá is clearly capitalizing on the similar-sounding articulation of *sún mọ́* and *Àsùnmọ́*. The reader also finds euphemism in the wordplay, "an alternative round-about mode of expression used in preference to a blunder, less delicate one" (Leech, 1969: 139). In short, Ìṣòlá chooses *sún mọ́* to express the idea of having sex.

In Yorùbá culture, it is considered taboo to speak about sex openly and without restraint. However, sex is an ever-fascinating topic and a universal phenomenon, one that, hypocritically, no Yorùbá is allowed to discuss publicly—except under special circumstances such as during the performance of certain festivals and oral genres. In Yorùbá riddle sessions, for instance, participants are free to engage in riddles and jokes that relate to sex and sexuality.[9] Outside these specific circumstances, however, anyone discussing sex or sexual organs (without using euphemistic language) is regarded as unacceptable and uncouth. Because of this cultural constraint, humor relating to sex and sexuality is often cast euphemistically, usually provoking a great deal of laughter and delight within the listeners. This is what Ìṣòlá strives to achieve as he retells the Adam and Eve myth—in order to unravel the riddle behind the etymology of a Yorùbá town's name.

Enigmatic Forms in Modern Literature

Evidence of enigmatic forms abounds in the works of contemporary Yorùbá writers. Writing from their ethnic base, these writers exploit the communal oral resources of this base for ideas, themes, and other linguistic influences. In so doing, contemporary writers participate in the global literary trend of intertextuality—which M. H. A. Abrams (1981) defines as a creative means used to "signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the feature of an earlier text by a later text, or simply by participation in a common stock of literary codes and conventions" (200). The theory of intertextuality, despite its Euro-Western origin, is not entirely alien to Yorùbá oral literary practice. More often than not, Yorùbá oral literary genres are assumed to have no individual authors, unlike written literature. In the words of Ruth Finnegan (1970), "such literature was, for instance, supposed to be the work of communal consciousness and group authorship rather than ...of an individual inspired artist" (36).

Literature does not evolve within a vacuum. It depends on the sociopolitical realities of its enabling milieu and the precursor texts, oral or written, for its impetus. Thus, in consonance with proponents of intertextuality who suggest that literature evolves from literature, one finds several modern Yorùbá writers depending heavily on materials from oral tradition for themes and styles in their own literary creations. Many of these modern writers started as literary scholars conducting painstaking

research concerning the oral tradition of their people. Individuals involved in this type of research are naturally motivated to incorporate oral materials into their own literary expression. Modern writers defer to orality as a strategy for exhibiting the aesthetics and richness of their tradition. This is in line with what Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, still considered one of the foremost Yorùbá modern writers, said in a July 2006 interview:

> What informs my use of oral tradition in general is to emphasize my debt to our heritage…Therefore, as a creative writer, I go back to the bank of images anytime that I am writing my scripts to retrieve stored pictures…My position as a writer, therefore, is that we should go back to the teachings in our culture, especially now that many people are alienated because we have refused to teach the values in our culture.[10]

Little wonder then that Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá (1990) integrates a long riddle-cum-folktale session into his biographical novel titled *Ogún Ọmọdé*. Here is an excerpt:

> On that night, before the moon took its full place in the sky, we all sat around on the veranda of *baálé*'s farm cabin. We young boys sat apart to one side, while young girls sat on the other side, trading riddles. We began first with firing a rapid round of riddles, taking turns leading this test of wittiness.
>
> Leader: Listen up everyone, riddles!
> All: *Go right ahead, let's hear them.*
> Leader: Ah, riddles, here they come.
> All: *Then let's have them!*
> Riddle: What drops noiselessly in water?
> Solution: *A needle.*
> Riddle: …The irreverent one that strikes the king's head?
> Solution: *A razor (in form of a folding knife).*
> Riddle: One single lobe of the kola nut, yet lasts through a long journey (to Ọ̀yọ́)?
> Solution: *The tongue.*
> Riddle: It journeys patter, patter to Ọ̀yọ́ and patter, patter back?
> Solution: *The soles of the foot.*
> Riddle: A huge pile of excrement covered with a broad leaf?
> Solution: *The earth and sky.*

RIDDLE: A huge flaming brand that drops in water but is not quenched?
Solution: *The palm nut.*

It was Èjíníkẹ̀ẹ́ who suddenly butted in, wanting "to tell a riddle." But Iyìọlá was quick to shut her up. "You, tell a riddle? You've got to be kidding me! What nerve! No, you cannot tell a riddle here in this gathering, you cheeky rattle-pate. Why don't you just go back to your porch and tell all the riddles you want there!"…The altercation settled, it was Àyọ̀ká's turn to strike the band, and strike the band she did with her tale and the warm-up to its telling:

"Hear, hear, a folktale here…"
"Let's hear it"
"I've got a story to tell"
"Let's hear it then."
"My story is a fantastic tale."
"About what?"
"It is about the Tortoise."
"Ah, that wily One with the infamous, age-old shell, husband of Yánníbo."
"Yes, indeed, and it's also about Dog and the Farmer."

"Long, long ago," she began, "the drought held Earth and Sky hostage, in a tight grip. Yam seedlings shriveled up and ceased to grow; ears of corn appeared but were deformed; even young girls grew stunted buds for breasts for want of nourishment. Rain came in teeny, weenie droplets; hens pecked away at nothing but rock solid ground; the chameleon camouflaged so verdantly that the goat almost devoured it, mistaking it for fodder."

"*My, that must have been some mighty fierce drought so shrivel up young girls' budding breasts like that!*" Jíire interrupted. Wild laughter erupted. "*It's all a lie. They just didn't have folks around to caress them to proper growth,*" Iyìọlá countered wickedly, raising even more laughter. Níkẹ̀ẹ́ wouldn't let them get away with it. "*Hunh, there you go again as always, smarty-pants*," she chided…

Àyọ̀ká continued, purposely ignoring Jíire's offhanded remark. "Ah, you guessed it. It was during one such wandering that Dog chanced upon a farm planted full of yams in the depths of a wilderness far, far away. Under the cover of dark night, Dog would journey to the farm, harvest a few yams and return home to enjoy his bountiful find. Dog

put on weight, his coat bright and shiny, while everyone else starved, their bodies grown gaunt. One day, Tortoise paid a visit to Dog to inquire about the secret to his healthy coat. 'Ah, sheer providence, Tortoise, sheer providence,' Dog answered with satisfaction. Tortoise asked if Dog would kindly share his secret. But Dog replied that he could not do that on account of Tortoise's notoriety as an incorrigible 'blabber mouth.'" "*Ah, that's quite true; talk about the eternal tattler!*" Dọlápọ̀ squealed.

Àyọ̀ká pressed on with her story. "Tortoise begged and pleaded and promised to keep the secret their *secret*. Tortoise beseeched Dog to have mercy on him and on his poor, starving children. At last, Dog relented and said, 'All right, tonight after dark, meet me at my house and bring along a carrying basket.' Tortoise thanked Dog and departed. Just before the dark that night, Tortoise turned up promptly at Dog's house, carrying a huge basket, one more than three times the size of his body. 'Since Tortoise could hardly carry the basket when empty, how was he going to manage it when filled?' Dog wondered. Dog instructed Tortoise to go back home and find himself a smaller, more manageable basket, but Tortoise would not be deterred, boasting that he could carry very heavy loads."

"*Yeah, likely story, the greedy-gut!*" *Àkànmú chimed in.*

"So off they went. When they arrived at the farm, Tortoise immediately went to work, digging and digging and digging, until Dog told him he had dug more than enough for one day. Tortoise turned a deaf ear! 'It's almost dawn; let's get out of here. Besides, Mr. Farm-Owner always shows up unfailingly on his property at the crack of dawn,' Dog entreated Tortoise. But Tortoise kept on digging until the large basket was filled with yams. And what he could not wedge into the overfilled basket, he intended to carry in each hand."

"*Ah, an obstinate, greedy one he was; always given to excess!*" That was me, adding my two bits.

Àyọ̀ká continued: "To be expected, of course, Tortoise could not even begin to lift the load, and what a chore it was before Dog helped him by lifting the heavy basket onto his back. After a few paces into their homeward journey, Tortoise began to show signs of distress. Dog's load was reasonably light because he had sensibly helped himself to only a few yams he could carry. What to do now? Tortoise could no longer walk under the strain of the heavy load, and Dog was in a hurry to get going lest they cross paths with Mr. Farm-Owner, on his way to his property. While Dog, leading the way, tried to high tail it out of there, Tortoise brought up the rear, literally crawling. When his

neck could no longer bear the strain, Tortoise pleaded in song (*a song in response to which you, as my audience, will sing the refrain thus: 'Jáńgíní-too-fín'*)."

Dog, Oh Dog, won't you lend me a hand with this load?
Jáńgíní-too-fín
Pray give me a hand, or with raised voice, I'll call on Mr. Farm-Owner.
Jáńgíní-too-fín
When Mr. Farm-Owner comes, he'll arrest and bind *you* up.
Jáńgíní-too-fín
Dog, Oh Dog, pray, lend me a hand with this load.
Jáńgíní-too-fín

"When he heard Tortoise's plea, Dog stopped, walked back to Tortoise and grabbed one large yam from his basket to help lighten the load. Then they continued on their homeward trek. A few more paces down the road, Tortoise again sang his plea for help…When Dog saw that Tortoise could barely lift another leg, he relieved him of few more large yams from his heavy load. A few paces later, it appeared Tortoise had begun scheming with a pattern of pleas mixed with threats. It did not seem to matter how many times Dog tried to help Tortoise by relieving his load, it was never helpful enough. Tortoise sang his doleful threat-pleas for help again and again…By then, Dog had become exasperated! He was furious! He had had enough!"

"*He should have just left the fool there, stranded. This scheming lout only wanted to get poor Dog into trouble!*" By now Dọlápọ̀ was animated.

"And that's precisely what Dog did!" Àyọ̀ká continued. "Dog left Tortoise right there in the middle of the road and went about the business of rushing home to avoid being caught. Alone, Tortoise dragged along, plea-singing dolefully, but not cheerless enough to want to leave behind any of his loot to lighten his load. The more his neck ached, the heavier the load became, and dawn was appearing above the horizon."

"*My goodness, it's nothing but sheer greed that's about to doom Tortoise. What if Mr. Farm-Owner catches him there red-handedly?*" Iyìọlá interjected his two bits into the story before Àyọ̀ká picked up her narration where she had left off. "Of course, Tortoise, the rogue, wanted to carry home every single yam by hook or crook. While he dragged on, huffing and puffing under the weight of the full basket, along came Mr. Farm-Owner down the road."

"*Aha, serves him right! He's got his just desserts. Let's see how he escapes this one,*" I added my two bits to Àyọ̀ká's story. "*Ah, you really do not know Tortoise and his wily ways. He's always got a fix up his sleeve,*" Iyìọlá tried to throw in his contribution to the story. With our many interludes, it appeared he and I were about to hijack Àyọ̀ká's narration of the story.

"Ah, but be patient you guys, just listen to this," Àyọ̀ká said, taking back the story. "When Mr. Farm-Owner saw Tortoise a few feet ahead, he was furious. He quickened his pace and soon met up with him. He asked him where the basket of yams came from and who the owner might be. Tortoise told him he was only 'a messenger, a carrier in the employment of Dog, the owner of the basket of yams,' which they both had dug up at a farm down the road, not too far from where they were standing. Tortoise further explained that Dog, the owner, forged ahead of him only because he, Tortoise, had the heavier load. 'So, Mr. Farm-Owner, go easy on me; please don't harass me,' Tortoise pleaded, trying to weave a convincing story." "*The darn liar!*" Èjíníkẹ́ẹ́ exclaimed from her quiet corner. "Mr. Farm-Owner grabbed Tortoise and marched him straight to the Ọba's court where Tortoise reiterated the same line about being only a messenger-carrier in the service of Dog, the owner of the yams. The Ọba ordered Dog to appear before him. Now, right after Dog had walked off, leaving Tortoise alone in the middle of the road, he had surmised that wily Tortoise would be up to his old tricks. Consequently, Dog had oiled himself down from head to toe the minute he reached home, feigning an attack of fever." "*Now, that's one crafty creature, if you ask me!*" Dọ́lápọ̀ interjected excitedly.

"The Ọba's messenger arrived at Dog's house to find him huddled in front of a fire, all bundled up, his gnashing teeth noisy like a vibrating machine. Anon, the messenger wished him a safe recovery and returned to report to the Ọba about what he had witnessed. 'Dog had the fever and chills pretty seriously and is in no shape to honor the summons,' he said. Unmoved by the messenger's eyewitness report, the Ọba commanded that they bring Dog, ill or otherwise, to his presence even if they had to carry him, to state his case and make his defense. The messenger returned and delivered the summons yet again. Dog asked for a minute or two to get himself ready. When Dog entered his room, he oiled anew every inch of his coat, then he carefully placed two whole, raw eggs in his mouth, securing one in each cheek. Soon, he and the messenger were on their way. They had barely walked a few yards when Dog told the messenger he felt dizzy and could walk

no farther. 'Do not worry,' the messenger said, intent on carrying out the Ọba's command. In a word, Dog arrived before the Ọba astride the messenger's back. In the meantime, the Ọba had summoned his chiefs to court to hear the case of a thief caught red-handedly. You all remember that stealing was a crime that carried the death penalty in that town."

"As soon as Dog appeared before the assembled court riding in piggybacked, the Chiefs were taken aback at the sight. Tortoise himself was thrown off guard, but nonetheless began his testimony, first accusing Dog of feigning illness when he had only just recently returned home from their stealing foray at the farm. Dog responded, telling the assembly that he had been seriously ill for the past three days, almost to the point of death. Just as he finished saying this, he cleverly dislodged, cracked, and spat out the raw egg he had planted in his right check as if he had vomited."

"*Now, that has got to be one mighty clever guy!*" I enthused.

"As they were busy offering their get-well wishes, Dog, as he did before, released the other raw egg from his left cheek. Undoubtedly, this was undisputed evidence enough to convince the court that Dog was indeed quite ill. Consequently, Dog was acquitted and set free to return home to his sick bed, the Ọba pronounced. The messenger once again carried him, piggybacked, home. This was how Dog cleverly freed himself from prosecution."

"*And so, what happened to Tortoise?*" Èjíníkẹ̀ẹ́ asked earnestly. "The death sentence, of course!" Àyọ̀ká answered gleefully. "To have not only perjured himself, but to have also lied bold-facedly against a poor sick friend was unconscionable, everyone agreed. The Ọba was furious, and pronouncing Tortoise guilty, he sentenced him to death by ordering that he be bound and hoisted up the highest branches of a teak tree towering above a rocky spot from where he was to be dropped to his death."

"*Oh, what a pity!*" Èjíníkẹ̀ẹ́ intoned, sadly. "*You've got to be kidding me! What a pity? Seriously, do you think stubborn, greedy ones like this shouldn't be put to death? So, what's this sympathetic* '*what a pity' business of yours?*" Iyìọlá, obviously on the side of "no mercy," jumped all over Èjíníkẹ̀ẹ́'s daring expression of sympathy!

"So, they led Tortoise away and dropped him from atop the highest bow of the teak tree. When he fell on the rocks below, his shell broke into shards, but he himself survived the fall. As soon as he fell, he let out a shrill cry: '*Cockroach, come reassemble me; Black Ant, come put me back together; Stink-Ant, come set and polish my shell*.' Then, Cockroach came

along and patched him up; Black Ant came and put him back together; and Stink-Ant too came to reset his shell and began to give it a high glossy shine. But just as Stink-Ant began this final process of restoration, blabber-mouth Tortoise indiscriminately covered his nose, insinuatingly, insultingly: 'Hmmm, what's this odor, this putrid smell?' Of course, who does not know that Stink-Ants emit such an awful odor, hence their name?" "*No kidding, they sure do!*" Dọlápọ̀ acknowledged. Well, Stink-Ant asked Tortoise what he had said. "Nothing important, really. I said, 'Well done, good job,'" Tortoise lied. "Oh, thank you," Stink-Ant replied, as he polished away at Tortoise's shell. "Phew, what on earth is that foul odor I smell?" Tortoise insinuated again. By now Stink-Ant felt truly insulted and quit the shell-polishing repair he had begun. Quitting halfway before the shell was completely set and properly polished explains why Tortoise's shell is asymmetrical and rough-hewn until this very day." To end her tale, Àyọ̀ká tried to show off her poetic skills:

"*This is the end of my tale, all told and unadorned*
This is the end of my tale truthfully told.
But if my telling of this tale has been less than truthful,
Should I chance upon a bunch of bananas,
Then may the children I birth be of likewise sized.
But should I come upon a bunch of plantains instead,
Then may the children I birth be of likewise sized
As with agelessness of the bitter-kola grove,
And the agedness the kola nut represents,
So too may the bitter kola embody our longevity,
And the kola nut our mortality.
If my telling tongue's not as earnest and full toned as a bell,
Then let the house rat recede to the rafters and make me a tuppence reward.
Now if my sweet telling tongue does not resound thrice,
Then let my name cease to be Àyọ̀ká this day hence.
So, here goes the ululating test: Is it True! True! True!
My tale, did it resound with truth or not?"
All: Resound with truth it did, indeed!

After Àyọ̀ká's tale was ended, the rest of us took turns telling stories. Jíire told a story about Leopard's drum which Tortoise stole. Níkẹ̀ẹ́ told one about the rat that stole the fermented bean-seed condiment. I, too, contributed the story of two co-wives whose husband abandoned them for three years. The moon was at its fullest and brightest. Iyìọlá

suggested that we play a game of hide-and-seek for a change. All the girls gathered together on one side and announced they would play a game of *sánsaalùbọ́* instead. At first, all the boys just stood back and watched them from a circle, holding hands. Nikẹ̀ẹ́ jumped in the middle of the circle and struck the band. And, *sánsaalùbọ́* it was, by acclamation, as she led the chant with the other girls echoed the refrain!

Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Aired out the yam flour.
ALL: *Laid it out flat…*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Aired out the yam flour.
ALL: *Laid it out flat…*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Today I aired out my yam flour.
ALL: *Laid it out flat…*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Next day I aired out the yam flour.
ALL: *Laid it out flat…*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Shall I come out now?
ALL: *No, No, not yet…*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Shall I come out now?
All: *No, No, not yet…*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: There's a sliver in my toe.
ALL: *Why then, remove it!*

Níkẹ̀ẹ́ grabbed a handful of sand from the ground and, going around the inside of the circle, marked on the ground all the conjoined hands of the circle, muttering as she made the round:

Níkẹ̀ẹ́: This here, the feces of the goat.
REFRAIN: *No, No, it's your feces.*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: This here is the sheep's feces.
REFRAIN: *No, No, it's your feces.*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: This is the duck's droppings.
REFRAIN: *No, No, it's your feces.*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: (*feigning creative exhaustion*) Very well then, ready or not, here I come, let me through.
REFRAIN: *No, No, not through here.*
Níkẹ̀ẹ́: Here I come, let me through.
REFRAIN: *No, No, let me through here!*

As she sang this song, she went from each conjoined hand to another, searching for an opening through which to exit. She watched and waited, eyeing the tight chain of hands, hoping to find a weak hand-

link. Pretty soon, she succeeded in breaking a link and made her way out of the circle. The group of girls clamored, then chased and caught her. They re-formed the circle, and a new leader stepped into the center of the circle to start the game anew.

We boys assented to playing a game of circling somersaults. We did not want to play hide-and-seek because we did not want the girls colliding with us as we chased each other around. Then, we formed a circle, joined hands tightly, and began circle-somersaulting to the rhythm of the Circle Somersaulting song:

Leader: Circle somersaulting…
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*
Leader: Circle somersaulting…
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*
Leader: He pounded yam, "pound."
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*
Leader: He made yam flour dough.
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*
Leader: Pound! Pound! Pound!
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*
Leader: Pound! Pound! Pound!
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*
Leader: Pound! Pound! Pound!
Refrain: *Somersaulting.*

We sang and sang, making up lines and turning somersaults endlessly, again by seniority, as with everything. It then came to Dọlápọ̀'s turn. As he lifted his foot over the right-hand circle-clasp with the boy next to him, his foot caught in the side opening of his partner's top garment…But before he could begin the tale of the torn shirt…we had cleverly struck the band with a derisive, insinuating song: "*The one the orò masquerade fell on, surely does not make a good night-game playmate, etc.*" Finally, we disbanded, each of us headed homeward. I went directly home and entered into a deafening silence.[11]

Ìṣọ̀lá's incorporation of this long riddle-cum-folktale session in his novel *Ogún Ọmọdé* conforms to the Yorùbá world discussed earlier in chapter one, where the session begins with the poser shouting, *ààlọ́ o* (riddle) and audience chorusing *ààlọ̀* (yes, [go ahead with the] riddle)—words that immediately create an atmosphere in which nothing should be believed or taken in a literal sense. Members of the audience then

vie to answer the riddles, and the poser (or a member of the audience) comments on the answers. Yorùbá riddles are usually shared in the evening when the day's work is done and people congregate outside their homes for storytelling. In all cases, riddling is a means of "warming up" or tuning the audience's intellect to narrative awareness, and so preparing them for the folktale proper that will follow. In short, riddles generally precede folktale narration, with grownups joining the children in posing and solving riddles. Also, there is no precedence given to the age, sex, or position of the participants during the riddle-cum-folktale session.

Both the individual leader and members of the audience take active part in the delivery or performance. The point is that the mere text of a riddle-cum-tale session is lifeless and is only "enlivened" during the telling and in the presence (and with the cooperation) of the audience. Therefore, it behooves scholars to honor and pay close attention to the importance of the audience's role in folklore scholarship. These contributive efforts of the audience are an integral aspect of the session. The Yorùbá riddle-cum-tale audience members are knowledgeable in that they are able to predict episodes, as well as the sequence of those episodes, and are already familiar with each character's behaviors and personalities. More importantly, audience members are potential leaders who can effortlessly transform themselves into narrators at the appropriate time. This kind of audience provides a role significantly more complex than passive recipient. A great asset to the leader, this type of audience makes contributions, asks questions, sings choruses, partakes in dramatization, reminds the leader of his or her lapses, and participates interactively throughout the session. This level of participation leads to a balanced match between skillful narrator and knowledgeable audience, resulting in a successful tale-riddle performance session.

Another prominent Yorùbá writer whose work belies absorption and adaptation of riddle discourse is Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí. In one of his poems in *Ewì Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí* (*Ìwé Kìíní*) edited by Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1982a), Fálétí uses the style of Yorùbá poetic tale-riddle known as *àrọ̀* to compose his lengthy poem entitled "Ẹ̀là Lọ̀rọ̀." As mentioned earlier in chapter three, *àrọ̀* tale-riddle is a type of puzzle in Yorùbá that is rendered entirely in poetry or in prose, or in a poetic-prosaic combination form. The leader asks a question, or a set of questions, or makes a statement containing some information to which the audience is invited to relate. *Àrọ̀* is a class of tales that opens with a question or set of problems for the audience to discuss or argue over in order to unlock the logic behind the question(s) or problem(s), and thus solve the puzzle. In compliance with this type of

traditional Yorùbá tale-riddle structure, Fálétí opens his poem by introducing five problems (in lines 7–13 in the excerpt below). These problems are later resolved by the poet through the narration of five different stories told to untie the knots in the five puzzles:

ÈLÀ LỌRỌ
Ẹ fẹ̀hìn tì, kí ẹ gbọ́dìí òwe.
Kí ẹ gbọ́hun tí mú wọn máa wí pé:
"Èlà Lọ̀rọ̀."
Mo ní eléte lète ń yé.
Ohun tí a bá ṣe níí yéni
N ó wí, n kò ní ṣàìsọ,
Bí ọkàa bàbà ti ṣe tó ti dénú ọká;
Bí kọ̀ǹkọ̀ ṣe tó fi rìn dénú ẹ̀kọ yangan;
Bẹ́ṣin ti ṣe tó fi wá orín fún olówó;
Èníyàn tó já lórí igi ata
Tố ṣe bẹ́ẹ̀ tó kú;
Ohun tí ojú àṣá rí tó
Kó tó fò fẹ̀rẹ̀, kó tó wá gún alápatà lọ́bẹ;
Lójúu gbogbo wa,
Gbogbo rẹ̀ ni mo fẹ́ sọ.
Ẹ sáà jẹ́ ká yanjú rẹ̀ lọ́kọ̀kan.
Ọ̀kọ̀kan nìyàwó àgbẹ̀ ń yọsẹ̀ lékù.
Bí igi bá wó lérí ara wọn,
Tôkè làá kọ́ gbé, gbogbo jọ̀nmọ́ọ̀ wa.
Kà ní bó ti rí, kà ní báà ti ṣe.
Tọ́kàa bàbà ti ṣe tó fi dénú ọká;
Ọká tí kì í jẹkà, tí kò lè jẹ yangan.
Ṣebí jẹ́jẹ́ làgbẹ̀ dáko tó gbinkà síbẹ̀?
Tọ́kà dàgbà tán
Tẵgbẹ̀ ṣabà ọkà sí àárin oko.
Àwọn èkúté kò sì bẹ̀sù bẹ̀gbà
Wọ́n kó sínú abà ọkà,
Ibẹ̀ ni wọ́n gbé ń yọ̀ mùmùràrà
Tí wọ́n gbé ń joóṣá, tí wọn gbé ń jẹ aro wọn;
Ìgbà tó wá dijọ́ kan wàyíò,
Tẵwọn èkúté jẹ ọkà bàbà tó pọ̀ tí wọn yó tán;
Ni gbédìígbédìí bá gbé wọn ko àgbákò ọká.
Àtẹgbárá, àtàfẹ̀, àtàgòrò, àtẹmọ́ àti mọlájù
Gbogbo wọn lọká jẹ.
Ìgbà tó wá bùṣe gàdà,

Tẃọn èkúté ṣẹ̀ ń rà tán nínú ejò láàrin oko;
'Un làgbẹ̀ bá làrè làrè làrè
Ló bá bá ọ̀ká pàdé láàrin oko;
Ní wọ́n bá táwọ́ síra wọn.
Nígbà tí wọ́n gbókùú ọ̀ká délé,
Tí wọ́n lanú ọ̀ká,
Tọ́kà sín lọ bí ìlẹ̀kẹ̀ nínú ìwọ́lẹ̀!
Gbogbo ahéré ya ẹnu!
Ni baba olóko wá ń ṣàlàyé;
Pé bí kò bá sí eku tó forí gbogbẹ́,
Bí kò bá sí àgbẹ̀ tó gbinkà sáàrin oko,
A kò lè bá ọ̀kàa bàbà nínú ọ̀ká.
A kò lè dénú ejò ká bá nǹkan pupa pupa!
Ẹ kú ìjòkó, ẹ kú etígbòǫ́ mi,
Gbogbo ẹlẹ́gbẹ́ wa!
Nígbà táa ti dénú ọ̀ká táa bọ́kàa bàbà
Ẹ jẹ́ a wá ṣàlàyé.
Bí kọ̀ǹkọ̀ ṣe tó fi dénú ẹ̀kọ yangan.
Ṣenú omi lẹbọlọ ń gbé?
Kọ̀ǹkọ̀ ní ṣọba wọn lálẹ̀ odò.
Kà ní bọ́rọ̀ ti wá jẹ́
Tí kọ̀ǹkọ̀ fi kúrò lálẹ̀ omi bọ́ sí gbangba?
Ǹjẹ́ bó ti jẹ́ nìyí, ẹ tẹ́tí ẹ gbóhùn ẹnuù mi.
Ìyá Adétutù ní ń lọ̀gì
Ìyá Adétutù níí ṣẹ̀kọ yangan lóko wa.
Ìgbà tó dàfẹ̀mọ́júmọ́ nìyá kọrí sọ́nà odò
Ó ponmi ó kún kete.
Àṣé kò sì mọ̀
Pé kọ̀ǹkọ̀ tó jẹ baálẹ̀ odò
Ti fi jàbùjàbù kó sínúu ládugbó tó wà lórí òun.
Ó délé tàìdélé, ó ti ń túmi dà sí kòkò ògì,
Tọ́ wà lórí iná tí wọn ó mú sèkọ yangan.
Ní déédé kò-ríni-kò-mọni, ni wọ́n ń pọ́nkọ.
Nígbà tó wá pẹ́ sá, tọ́kọ ìyá Adétutù bọ̀ oko.
Nìyá Adétutù bá gbákàsù kalẹ ,
Pé kí baba Adétutù ó mú pòǹgbẹ.
Nígbà tí baba Adétutù hókọ,
Ló bá tapá titan kọ̀ǹkọ̀ tí wọn já dà sínú ẹ̀kọ!
Ó ní: "kí ló ti rí?"
Ó léèésẹ tí kọ̀ǹkọ̀ fi rìn dénú ẹ̀kọ yangan?
Ni ìyá Adétutù wá ṣàlàyé.

Pé, bóyá nígbà tóun jí rodò láfẹ̀júmọ́,
Ni kọ̀ǹkọ̀ ṣèèṣì kó sí kete láìfura òun.
Baba Adétutù kò kúkú bèṣù, kò bẹ̀gbà mọ́
Ló bá fẹ̀hìn tì, ló bá fitan kọ̀ǹkọ̀ jẹ̀kọ.
Ẹ wá bi mí ẹ pógbọ́n kí leṣin dá,
Kí ó tó wá orín rèé fún olówó rẹ̀ lábà oko.
Agódóńgbó kò kúkú lọ́kọ́,
Bẹ́ẹ̀ leṣin kò ní ìgùdan.
Òrọ̀ọ bó bá ti jẹ la ó wí.
Ẹ jẹ́ kí n wíràn ẹnuu mi.
Níjọ́ tẹ́ṣin Akíndélé ru orín bọ̀ egàn;
Ṣojú wa ló ṣe.
Jéjẹ́ l'Akíndélé ń renú oko rẹ̀ ló mẹ́ṣin lọ,
Tọ́ dẹ́sẹ̀ àlà tán tó so ẹṣin mọ́ igi ewúro.
Bẹ́ṣin ti ń jẹko, l'Akíndélé ń roko lọ.
Bẹ́ṣin ti ń yán hòò,
Akíndélé ń fọkọ́ rẹ̀ balẹ̀ fara fínra.
Bí eré bí àwàdà,
Àtẹṣin àt'Akíndélé
Wọ́n ń ṣe tó bí ẹgbèrin ebè láàrin ara wọn.
Ìgbà tó yá làwọn oníṣẹ́ súré tilé dé
Wọ́n wá sọ f'Ákíndélé,
Pé ìyàwó rẹ̀ bíbejì takọtabo.
Ayọ̀ abara tín-ń-tín.
Aṣé bẹ́ẹ̀ làá ṣe tí à á yọ̀, gbogbo ẹlégbẹ́ wa?
Akíndélé yọ̀, yọ̀, yọ̀.
Ó ṣe bẹ́ẹ̀ ó gbàgbé ẹṣin rẹ̀ sáàrin oko.
Ṣé nígbà tí Akíndélé ti fẹ́yàwó rẹ̀
Nígbà ogun Àdùbí,
Tí ogun Étílà fi dé, wọn kò rámì ọmọ.
Ìgbà tọ́mọ wá jàjà dé.
Akíndélé yọ̀, yọ̀, yọ̀
Ó gbàgbé ẹṣin rẹ̀ sáàrin oko.
Ìgbà tó yá tẹ́ṣin wo iwá tí kò róníwá.
Ó wẹ̀hìn, kò rẹ́lẹ́hìn.
Ó wọ̀kánkán, kò rólówó rẹ̀ láàrin oko.
Leṣin bá fagi tí wọ́n so ó mọ́.
Ó fagi tu tán, ó dilé Akíndélé baba ọmọ!
Ìgbà tẹ́ṣin wọ́gi ewúro délé ti-gbòǹgbò ti-gbòǹgbò.
Akíndélé rẹ́ṣin, ó yanu.
Ló bá túgi ewúro kúrò lọ́rùn ẹṣin.

Ó gé gbòǹgbò rẹ̀ kékèké
Ó kó wọn dà sínú àárò.
Ó sun wọ́n tán, ó kó wọn sóríi pẹpẹ.
Ìgbà tó wá dìjọ́ kẹta wàyíò,
Tí wọn wá ń yọ̀ f'Ákíndélé,
Tí àwọn èèyàn ń dìde ní àárọ̀ kùtùkùtù
Tí wọn kò ríhun kínrìn-ín ẹnu,
L'Akíndélé bá gun àjà
Ló bá kórín ewúro dà sí àrìn wọn.
'Un ló wá ń ṣàlàyé
Pé ẹṣin òun ló wá orín ọ̀hún bọ̀ oko
Ni gbogbo ènìyàn bá ń ṣe há hà háà!
Akíndélé ní ẹ má ṣe há hà háà mọ́.
Ó ní bí kò bá sí ọmọ kékeré jòjòló
Tó wolé òun yà sí;
Èèyàn ò lè ríbi orín gbé dihun àmúbọ̀ oko fẹ́ṣin.
'Un ló wá ṣàlàyé bó ti gbàgbé ẹṣin rẹ̀ sí àlà oko.
Ó sọ bẹ́ṣin ti ṣe ru orín wálé tigitigi!
Ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀!
Ǹjẹ́, ẹ jẹ́ ká tún ṣàlàyé fúnra wa díẹ̀
Kọ́rọ̀ wa ó yéra wa.
Nítorí pé níjọ́ ìjàǹbá ṣẹ̀ lókè ẹgàn, ṣojú wa ni.
Níjọ́ tí baba já lórí igi ata tí baba kú.
Níjọ́ tí baba já lulẹ̀ lọ́rùn igi ata; tó bági ata lọ.
Ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀; ẹ jẹ́ a ṣàlàyé díẹ̀ lọ́rọ̀ wa.
Ṣebí ìyàn ló fa sábàbí ọ̀rọ̀!
Ìyàn ló mú ni wọ́n kò rí ata mú sebẹ̀ lọ́nà oko.
Wọ́n ń fi ataare selá,
Wọ́n ń fìyèré sebẹ̀ eéyọ́.
Iná lásán ni wọ́n fi ń sun ẹran jẹ.
Nígbà tó wá dìjọ́ kan wàyíò,
Tí baba kan ń darí bọ̀ oko.
Tí ń bọ̀ pẹ̀lú ọmọ rẹ̀ tó jọ́kùnrin.
Un ló wòkè ló rí nǹkan pupa wẹẹrẹ lókèrè
Lórí igi tó ga fío fío;
Ni baba bá múra, ó dọ̀hún.
Ó dọ́hùn-ún tán ó rí ata ló so jìngbìnnì,
Lókè rẹ̀ lórí igi òkú àràbà
Àṣé ẹyẹ ló hùwà àgbẹ̀,
Ẹyẹ ló gbáta ọ̀hún dọ́rùn igi.
Ni baba bá múra ló ń gungi,

Ni baba bá bọ́ṣọ sílẹ̀ ló mú àràbà gùn.
(Nítorí kó lè tètè játa sápò kó ma di tẹnịẹlẹ́ni)
Igi tó ti kú látọdún tẹ́nìkan kò mọye,
Igi tó ti hù bìẹ̀bìẹ̀ látìgbà òjò
Baba múra, ó ta mọ́gi nítorí ata.
Baba sì gbìyànjú, gbìyànjú,
Ó rígi náà mú gùn dórí.
Ó ń bẹ́ kẹ́sẹ́, bó ti ń reta lóri igi gíga fìo fìo.
Bẹ́ẹ̀ lọmọ rẹ̀ ń wòkè yàn yàn yàn
Bi ajá gbéhun táa-kò gbọdọ̀-sọrúkọ gungi.
Ìgbà tó yá lọ̀rọ̀ dàrú,
Nigi bá ṣèèṣì dá.
Lòkú igi bá yẹ̀ lẹ́sẹ̀ẹ̀ baba.
Àfi gbẹ̀, ni baba já lógèdèǹgbé lulẹ̀, tí kò lè mira.
Lọmọ bá fariwo ta, ló kọrí sábúlé.
Ló ń wí pé kí wọn ó tètè wá gba baba òun,
Tọ́ já lórí igi ata!
Ló ń ké, "Ẹ dákun, ẹ tètè wá."
"Ẹ wá ṣonígbọ̀wọ́ mi, baba já lórí igi ata."
Ẹ wá wo gìrìgìrì ẹsẹ̀!
Níjọ́ tí gbogbo ayé ń lọ wòran
Baba tó já lórí igi.
Nígbà tí wọn yó fi rìn débẹ̀,
Baba ti kú, baba ti lọ!
Ọmọ ló wá ń ṣàlàyé ọ̀rọ̀
Níbi tí gbogbo abúlé gbé yanu;
Pé ẹyẹ tó hùwà àgbẹ̀
Ló jẹ́ káta ó hù lọ́rùn igi gíga;
Àti pé igi àràbà ló ṣalátìlẹhìm igi ata
Kígi ata ó tó pa baba.
Èlà lọ̀rọ̀
Èǹìyàn táa kò bá sọ fún kò lè yé e;
Ohun tí àṣá rí kó tó gún alápatà lọ́bẹ.
Ǹjẹ́ bó ti rí rèé gbogbo jọ̀nmọ́ọ̀ wa!
Jẹ́jẹ́ lẹ́ẹ́ran ń kiri ẹran lọ,
Àwọn ìyàwó ilé ló pẹ́ẹ́ran yà níta gbangba;
Àwọn àgbà tí kò níṣẹ́ náà ń ṣọ́fintótó,
Nibi táya wọn gbé ń yọwó ẹran;
Àṣé bó ti ń ṣèǹìyàn ló ń ṣàsá:
Bí wọn ti ń yọwó ẹran
Bẹ́ẹ̀ làṣá ń fò lọ, fò bọ̀.

Àṣé àṣá náà ń ṣòpò,
Ó ń wáhun tí yó jẹ síkùn ara rẹ̀ ni.
Níbi tẹ́lẹ́ran gbé ń ṣàròyé
Pẹ́ran òun ò pójú owó,
Un làṣá bá fò fẹ̀rẹ̀ ló gbẹ́ran nígbá tọ̀bẹtọ̀bẹ.
Ni ọ̀rọ̀ bá dìbànújẹ́.
Lalápatà bá fìkanra mẹ́yẹ.
Ẹni tí ń sọ̀kò ń sọ̀ko,
Ẹni tó fagi yọ—
Gbogbo wọn ń sọ̀rọ̀ ìbínú.
Pé kí ni ká ti gbọ́
Pé, àṣá tún fò fẹ̀rẹ̀
Ó wá gbẹ́ran nígbá tọ̀bẹtọ̀bẹ lójuu wa!
Bí wọ́n mọ̀, wọn ìbá tí bínú.
Bí wọ́n mọ̀, wọn ìbá tí sọ̀kò.
Nígbà tídàámú bá àṣá,
Ni àṣá bá gbọ́bẹ jù sílẹ̀ tẹrantẹran.
Bíbọ̀ tọ́bẹ ń bọ̀ tàrà,
Déédé itan ẹlẹ́ran lọ̀bẹ gbà lọ—
Lariwo bá sọ!
Ni àwọn bá ń lọ̀bòsí àṣá!
"Àṣá gún alápatà lọ́bẹ, ẹ gbà wá o!"
Kí ẹ wá wèjè bàlà
Bí ẹní pa màlúù bí ọ̀yà!
Gbogbo ẹni ó bá wa débẹ̀ tó kàndí,
Gbogbo ẹni ó ba débẹ̀ tó bèèrè,
Ni wọ́n ń ṣàlàyé fún;
Báṣàá ṣe gbẹ́ran nígbá tọ̀bẹtọ̀bẹ;
Bẹ́ẹ̀ lalápatà kò sì ní gbàgbé ohun tójú rí;
Kálápatà ó tó yọ̀bẹ nítan.
Ǹjẹ́ àlàyé lẹ gbọ́ yìí, gbogbo jọ̀nmọ́ọ̀ wa!
Bí ọ̀ká ti ṣe tó fi dénú ọ̀ká;
Bí kọ̀ǹkọ̀ ṣe rìn dénú ẹ̀kọ yangan;
Ẹṣin tó wá orín fún olówó;
Ẹni tó já lórí igi ata tó ṣe bẹ́ẹ̀ tó kú;
Bí àṣá ti ṣe kó tó gún alápatà lọ́bẹ;
Kí ẹ wọlé kí ẹ fún mi lóbì ló kù!
Ẹ wọlé ẹ mú obì wá.
Ẹ kúkú ti mọ ìdí òwe!
(EXPLANATORY TREATISE
Sit back, relax and hear the reason for this proverb.

Also, listen to the reason for this proverbial saying:
"Words are decipherable."
It is only the cunning person who understands his/her own tricks.
Everyone understands his/her own tricks
I shall say, I shall surely but say,
How the guinea corn found its way into the belly of a cobra;
How the frog found its way into ẹ̀kọ́[12] *corn meal;*
How the horse got orín[13] *(local tooth brush) for its owner;*
The one who fell off the stalk of pepper plant
And died eventually;
The escapades of the hawk
To have made it to soar up high and then stabbed the butcher;
Right here, in our presence,
I am about to tell all.
Allow me to explain them one after the other.
It is gently and systematically, that a farmer's wife withdraws her leg from the palm oil vessel.
If a tree fell on top of the other,
It is the one at the top we would remove first, O people!
There is a reason, there is a sure reason.
Why the guinea corn found its way into the belly of the cobra;
Cobra who does not eat either guinea corn or maize.
Was it not the farmer who subtly cultivated his farmland and planted guinea corn in there?
The guinea corn had sprouted
And the farmer erected a cabin at the center of the farmland.
The rodents of rat family without further ado
Invaded the farmland and the guinea corn barn,
They were roistering and devouring the guinea corn
Morning, night and noon;
And then one fateful day,
In which the rats had had their fill of the guinea corn;
They met their waterloo in the farmland as the cobra landed in their midst.
The glossy skinned rats, the white bellied rats, the hares, the brown rats, and the beavers
All of them got eaten by the cobra.
And at last,
After the rats had digested well in the belly of the snake at the center of the farmland;
Unexpectedly, the farmer

Walked into the cobra at the center of his farmland;
They had a confrontational struggle.
When the dead cobra was brought home,
And they sliced its belly,
The guinea corn lined in abundance as a chain of beads in the catacombs!
All the villagers were in shock!
And so the farmer started explaining what happened;
That if the rats had not been wounded,
And if the farmer had not planted the guinea corn in the center of the farmland,
We could not have found the guinea corn in the belly of the cobra.
We could not possibly dissect the snake and found red seedlings!
Hope you are well seated, and, happy listening to you,
All my comrades!
Now that we have found the guinea corn in the belly of the cobra
Let us make another exposition.
That is, how the frog found its way inside *ẹ̀kọ* corn meal
Is it not inside the water that the pond urchin lives?
The frog is the king of its kind at the bottom of the river.
And why is it
That the frog left its abode at the bottom of the river for the surface land?
This is how it happened; pay attention to what I have to say.
It was Adétutù's mom who was grinding the corn
It was Adétutù's mom who made corn meal in our village.
The old woman made a trip to the river at dawn
She fetched water that filled the water pot to the brim.
She never knew
That the frog, who is the king of the amphibians
Had gotten into the water pot on her head unexpectedly.
Just as soon as she got home, she poured the water in the cooking pot of corn meal,
The one on the stove, to be used in preparing *ẹ̀kọ*.
It was at dawn that they prepare corn meal.
After a long while, the husband of Adétutù's mom returned from the farm.
It was then that Adétutù's mom brought out the wrapped cold corn meal,
For Adétutù's dad to drink and refresh himself.
When Adétutù's dad had unwrap the corn meal,

He found in there the disembodied parts of the frog!
He said: "How come?"
He exclaimed that, how did the frog found its way into the corn meal?
Adétutù's mom had to explain.
That, perhaps when she went to the river at dawn,
That was when the frog mistakenly jumped inside the water pot, and she did not know.
Adétutù's dad did not waste time again;
He relaxed and ate the corn meal with the frog's thigh.
Now come and ask me the trick that the horse used,
That made it to bring *orín* for its owner at the farm-house.
The colt did not have a hoe,
Just as well, the horse did not have a farm tool.
This matter has to be said.
Allow me to say what is on my mind.
This particular day, that Akíndélé's horse brought *orín* from the forest;
We were witnesses to it.
When Akíndélé was going to the farm he took his horse along,
He got to the boundary of his farm and tied his horse to the bitter-leaf tree.
As the horse was grazing the grass, Akíndélé too was hoeing the farmland.
As the horse was having its fill of the grass,
Akíndélé too had done a lot in clearing the weeds.
Before long,
Both Akíndélé and his horse
Had cleared up to 800 heaps of earth between them.
After a while, some emissaries came from home
They came to inform Akíndélé,
That his wife had delivered a set of twins—one male and one female.
This joy called for merriment.
Isn't this how we make delightful merriment, my peers?
Akíndélé was excessively joyful.
He was so carried away with glee that he forgot his horse in the middle of the farm.
You must know that, ever since Akíndélé married his wife
Since the time of the Second World War,
Up till the Hitler War, they did not have a child.
Now that they were lucky to have these children.

Akíndélé was over joyous
And, he left his horse in the middle of the farm.
The horse looked around but could not see anyone.
It looked far behind it, but did not see anyone.
It looked far into the distance, but could not locate its owner in the middle of the farm.
So, the horse had to pull at the tree on which they had tied it upon.
It pulled the tree and made a trip to the house of Akíndélé, the new father!
The horse had to drag the bitter leaf tree from the root, home.
Akíndélé was surprised to see the horse.
He disentangled the bitter leaf tree from the neck of the horse.
He cut the roots of the tree into short stripes
And put them in the oven.
He roasted them and placed them on the shelf above the fire place.
On the third day,
When people came to rejoice with Akíndélé,
When people woke up early in the morning
And needed to have a mouth wash,
Akíndélé had to climb the ladder to the mantelpiece
And brought down the *orín* stripes made from bitter leaf tree, and place these before them.
It was him who now revealed to them
That it was his horse who brought the *orín* from the farm field;
Everyone was alarmed!
Akíndélé told them not to be alarmed.
He said if not for the arrival of the newborn babies
That were destined to come to his family;
No one would have been able to see the horse bring *orín* from the farm.
And so, he narrated to them how he forgot his horse at his farm's borderline.
He told them how the horse dragged the bitter leaf tree from its root home!
Words are expository!
Now let us once again make a detailed account of the situation ourselves;
So that we can understand ourselves better.
You see, the day there was a disaster at the upper part of the forest, I was a witness.
The day the old man fell from the pepper plant and died.

The day that an old man fell from the stalk of the pepper tree and died in the process.
Words are expository; allow me to make a little explanation on this matter.
It was famine that was at the root of the matter!
There was famine in the land and there was no pepper to cook with in the village.
They were using alligator pepper as spice for cooked okra,
And *ìyèré*[14] for cooking *eéyọ́*[15] vegetable.
It is only fire they use in roasting their meat.
So, on a certain day,
When an old man was returning from his farm.
He was returning with his son.
He looked up and saw some red things from afar
On top of a very tall tree;
The old man decided to check it out.
He got there and saw with his very eyes that it was a bunch of very ripe pepper,
On top of a very tall dead white silk cotton tree
(Unknown to the old man), it was a bird that was behaving like a farmer,
It was the bird that brought those pepper to the top of the tree.
As the old man prepared to climb the tree,
He removed his clothes and climbed the tree.
(He wanted to quickly pluck the pepper and not forfeit the chance to another person)
The tree that had been dead for ages,
The tree already weakened during the raining season
The old man sprang on the tree because of pepper.
The old man exerted himself, he persevered,
He eventually climbed the tree to the very top.
He was moving briskly as he was picking the pepper from the very tall tree.
As he was doing this, his son was looking up at him frantically
As a dog would do when chasing that which we dare not call by name.
As time went on, there was confusion,
The tree snapped unexpectedly.
The dead tree moved out of place, and the old man's leg slipped.
With a bang, the old man fell down from that great height, unable to move.

His son raised an alarm and ran towards the village.
He was shouting for help and assistance for his father,
Who fell from the pepper plant!
He was wailing, "Please, come quickly."
"Come and assist me, my old man fell from the pepper plant."
Oh! What a stampede!
On the day the whole town was going to see
The man that fell down from the pepper plant.
Before they could all get there,
The old man had died, the old man had gone!
It was the son that was narrating what happened
And the villagers were surprised;
That it was the bird that was as adventurous as a farmer;
Who made pepper to grow on a very tall tree;
More so, it was the white silk cotton tree that supported the pepper plant
And thereafter the pepper plant killed the old man.
Words are expository.
Those whom we did not tell may not understand;
What prompted the hawk to stab the butcher.
This was how it all happened, my people!
The butcher was going about hawking his meat,
When the housewives beckoned to him at the frontage of the house;
Some jobless older men were also there doing busybody,
While their wives were haggling the price of the the meat;
As it is with all humans so it is with the hawk:
As they were haggling the price of the meat
The hawk was parading, flying back and forth.
The hawk was doing all these gimmicks,
Searching for what to eat.
As the butcher was talking at great length, complaining
On the price they are offering for the meat,
The hawk dived down in a twinkling of an eye and carried the meat together with the knife.
It was a sad occurrence.
The butcher was fretful towards the bird.
Those who could throw stones at it were doing so,
Those who could bring out sticks—
All of them were talking in angry tones.
That this was unheard of
That a hawk could dive down

And carry away the meat in the presence of everyone!
If only they had known, they would not have been angry.
If only they had known, they would not have thrown stones.
When the hawk was greatly frustrated,
The hawk had to drop the knife as well as the meat.
As the knife was coming straight down,
It came down straight to stab the thigh of the butcher—
There was a loud cry!
There was a commotion about the hawk!
They were saying, "Please come to our aid.
The hawk had stabbed the butcher!"
Oh! See how blood was pouring out from the wound
As if a cow had been slaughtered for a stipend!
Everyone that got there was reluctant to move forward,
Everyone who got there was looking askance,
They were being given the explanation;
On how the hawk flew off with the meat and the knife;
The butcher too would definitely never forget all he went through;
Before the knife could be pulled out from his thigh.
I guess this is the exposition of those riddles, O my people!
How the guinea corn got into the belly of the cobra;
How the frog got inside the corn meal;
The horse that got *orín* for its owner;
The fellow that fell down from the pepper plant only to die in the process;
How the hawk came about stabbing the butcher;
I need to be appreciated!
Go inside the house and bring a gift of appreciation.
You have now known the meaning behind the riddle!)[16]

Fálétí's goal here is to exploit the style of Yorùbá poetic tale-riddle (*àrọ̀*) to explain the notion of *ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀*, which Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah (2010) defines as "Yorùbá indigenous discourse on criticism and interpretation" (1). *Ẹ̀là Lọ̀rọ̀* terminology is better explained through the Yorùbá sentence: *ohun tí à ń là ni ọ̀rọ̀*,—what we (do) break (into pieces) is a word/speech. It is rooted in what the Yorùbá calls *àlàyé*; that is, Yorùbá semantic poetics: what is broken or cut into pieces, or what is explained in order for it to be clearer. The Yorùbá may say, *là á yé mi*, literally "break down (or cut) the issue or word into pieces" so as to make it more comprehensible. *Ẹ̀là Lọ̀rọ̀* as a discourse strategy approaches critical imagination and appreciation with values rooted in aspirations for societal growth

and development. Its intent is to sharpen one's critical thinking. In short, an invocation of *ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀* calls for a closer, more critical examination and understanding of a performance or of cultural material. For example, the performance might be a well-rehearsed or an impromptu speech, both of which use cultural paradigms of casting, recasting, re-presentation, or rephrasing. Word choices may be simple but rich in content nevertheless to arrive at cultural interpretation and meanings in which both the process and results of interpretation are logical, equally important, and desirable. In short, *ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀* asks for a "surgical" operation, using community wisdom; the "surgical tools" reside in riddles, proverbs, adages, and metaphors.

The combination of the five puzzles listed by Fálétí at the beginning of his poem (in lines 7–13), and the narration of the five stories (in the remaining part of the poem) during which the poet tries to resolve each riddle, convincingly sums up the Yorùbá concept of *ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀*—a discourse analysis and interpretation rooted in ethnic, historic, linguistic, and community rhetoric, making full use of native wisdom and local analytical patterns. Fálétí believes that readers can learn to invoke the concept of *ẹ̀là lọ̀rọ̀* as a discourse tool to understand his rhetorical choices as well as the critical framework of his poetry.

One of the most interesting features of Fálétí's poetry may be found in the opening lines. Referring to this very phenomenon, Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí (1982b) observes that Fálétí uses "arresting utterances that are designed to catch the readers' attention at the beginning of his poems" (63). These utterances focus on the crux of the poems so that the reader who intends to get at the root of the lesson is teased to read further. For example, the opening lines of Fálétí's poem, "Ẹ̀là Lọ̀rọ̀" (7–13), beyond their thematic relevance, serve as a catalyst for the reader to delve deeper. Like the traditional Yorùbá oral poet who has to catch the attention of her/his audience before s/he can hope to communicate with them, Fálétí engages in the same strategy. Creating five puzzles at the beginning of his poem to capture the readers' attention, he then proceeds to resolve each puzzle by narrating five fictitious but logical stories.

Thus, the pattern of enigmatic forms in modern Yorùbá literature varies according to individual writer. Some, like Ìṣọ̀lá, employ as many forms as possible to achieve desired effects in their works. With these writers, one finds within the space of a single text, varieties such as regular riddles, song-riddles, poetic puzzles, children game songs and ryhmes, folksongs, folktales, myths, oral history, proverbs, and so on. These oral materials occur in the text as reconstructed forms adapted to new social

situations, but the essence of their orality still survives. These creatively ingenious writers intentionally borrow from, and preserve, different forms of Yorùbá oral tradition in their works. For some writers like Fálétí, however, the interest is in a single oral corpus. He seizes on the dominant appeal of the genre to explore sociopolitical phenomena or philosophical concerns.

Consequently, the integration of enigmatic forms into contemporary literature falls into two categories: (i) documentation and (ii) manipulation. By documentation, I mean a writer's adoption of specific segments of literary materials from oral genres, which s/he lifts verbatim and inserts appropriately in her/his writing with few or no changes. In contrast, manipulation implies that writers carefully make selective use of elements of oral tradition, which they exploit to support or advance the central theme(s) of their work. What appeals to this second category of writers is not just the act of preserving original material, but rather the process of exploring ideas within that material that they believe possess enduring relevance. At this level, writers transform oral tradition into metaphorical and symbolic language that best articulates their political or philosophical positions. This suggests that orality is not static, but dynamic, flexible, and adaptable to change. As such, oral tradition must be viewed as an integrative, and even innovative, force allowing for new forms of expression. In short, the phenomenon of orality—and its corresponding modes of communication—has been effectively modernized by contemporary Yorùbá writers, reflecting the attainment of sophisticated levels of signification and synthesis. I submit that this development of fresh mechanics for modern literature is relevant, valuable, and a major part of the achievement of the literary creations of contemporary Yorùbá writers.

Enigmatic Forms, the Media, and Popular Culture

In one of her scholarly essays, Karin Barber (2010) argues that virtually all new popular cultural forms in Africa have been shaped by "techniques and conceptions drawn from the media in the last one hundred years; while older oral genres have been subtly but definitively recast as they have been drawn into new performance spaces on the airwaves or in print" (3). Barber further contends that most of what is now regarded as "popular" (as distinct from "traditional") in African culture was forged in colonial and postcolonial contexts deeply entwined with print, film, radio, and later on, with television and video. At the same time, most of

what is regarded as traditional has also been touched by these media in one way or the other. While Barber shares the sentiment that the impact of the media has been "baleful, swamping indigenous cultural production, wiping out cherished traditions, and force-feeding entire populations with cheap, meretricious foreign culture" (3), she thoughtfully reminds readers the extent to which African cultural innovators have seized upon opportunities offered by the media to revitalize their traditions and generate new forms.

For example, when the first indigenous weekly (bilingual) newspaper *Ìwé Ìròyìn Fún Àwọn Ará Ẹgbá àti Yorùbá* was established in Nigeria in 1859, its editor, Henry Townsend, made sure that excerpts and examples from Yorùbá verbal arts like riddles, folktales, myths, and legends were included. This held true for the very first issue and for every issue thereafter. During the 1920s, numerous Yorùbá newspapers were published to satisfy the sociopolitical needs of southwestern Nigeria. First came the paper *Èkó Àkéte*, edited by Adéoyè Dẹ́nígà and introduced in 1922—followed by E. A. Akíntàn's *Elétí Ọfẹ* in 1923. A year later the Ìbàdàn-based *Yorùbá News* appeared, edited by D. A. Ọbasá. In 1926 *Èkó Ìgbèhìn* was published and two years later yet another newspaper, *Akéde Èkó*, began circulation with I. B. Thomas as its editor (Ògúnṣínà, 1992: 6–12). Each of these publications included collections of verbal arts such as riddles, proverbs, myths, legends, and folktales.

Of the above listed publications, one ranks higher than the rest in terms of its emphasis on publishing oral materials: the *Yorùbá News*. Long before the newspaper was established, its editor and publisher, D. A. Ọbasá, had been actively collecting and documenting Yorùbá verbal arts. He states this fact in the preface of the first (of his three) anthologies:

> *Ó di ọdún mọ́kànlélógbọ̀n nísisìyí (AD 1896–1927) tí mo ti bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí ṣaáyan kíkójọ àwọn ọgbọ́n àtaiyébáiyé ti àwọn baba ńlá wa, tíí máa hun jáde nínú orin, ègè, rárà, ìpẹ̀sà, àròfọ̀, oríkì, ìlù, fèrè, àti àgbékà ọ̀rọ̀ wọn.* (Ọbasá, 1927: i)
> (For the past 31 years (1896–1927), I have been assembling Yorùbá traditional sayings that embody the wisdom of our forefathers. These sayings are found in songs and in various forms of Yorùbá poetry: *ègè, ìjálá, ìpẹ̀sà, àròfọ̀, oríkì*, and in the language of the drum and the flute.)

From his personal collection, then, Ọbasá carefully selected and strung together traditional sayings relevant to his own writings in the *Yorùbá*

News. Like a competent tradition-bearer, "he was able not only to reproduce previously learned material, but also to transform, according to mastered rules familiar elements into new wholes" (Ọlábímtán, 1974b: 41–42).

In Nigeria today all major newspapers, whether published in English or in indigenous languages, still include various forms of verbal arts, especially riddles, puzzles, proverbs, and folktales. For example, the weekend edition of the *Sunday Punch*, which claims to be the most widely read newspaper in Nigeria, regularly includes collections of riddles, puzzles, jokes, and witty sayings in its children column "Young Punchers." A unique aspect of "Young Punchers" is that its contributors are mostly elementary, junior high (middle school), and high school students. The following student submissions were published on page 54 of the May 19, 2013, *Sunday Punch*:

Riddle: I am something; when I cry people pick me up. What am I?
Answer: Handset (cell phone).
Riddle: I am something; since I have taken my bath, I have never been dry. What am I?
Answer: Tongue.
Riddle: I am something; I see both inside and outside of a house. What am I?
Answer: Door.
Riddle: I am something; children love my first five letters but hate my last four letters. What am I?
Answer: Sugarcane.[17]
Riddle: I am a city in which nobody can live. What am I?
Answer: Electricity.[18]
(Submitted by Jubril Martins Babátúndé Búsàrí, Ìmẹ̀sí-Ilé Commercial Grammar School, Ìmẹ̀sí-Ilé, Ọ̀ṣun State).
Riddle: I am a table that has no legs. What am I?
Answer: Timetable.[19]
Riddle: I am a sentence and contain all the words. What am I?
Answer: Education.[20]
Riddle: What is it that goes up when the rain comes down?
Answer: Umbrella.
Riddle: I am something; I have holes all over me yet I still hold water. What am I?
Answer: Sponge.

RIDDLE: Give me food I will eat, but give me water I will die. What am I?
ANSWER: Fire.
(Submitted by Ògúntádé Roseline, Springboard College, Lagos, Lagos State).

In addition to print media, electronic media such as radio and television continue to broaden the domain of verbal arts. The performance of different forms of oral tradition commonly occurs on radio and television stations across Nigeria's 36 states.

During my late 1990s fieldwork in Nigeria, I took note that the federal government's policies toward the press were increasingly liberal. This liberalization has resulted in the proliferation of private FM radio stations and cable television networks, offering programming not only in English but also in various Nigerian languages. This has proved a catalyst for many private FM radio and TV stations to allocate airtime to proverbs, riddles and puzzles competitions, and other forms of verbal productions such as songs and chants. An excellent example is the weekly riddle-cum-folktale session entitled "Ààlọ́ Ìyá Àgbà" (Folktale Session with Grandma), featured on DSTV, a leading cable television network provider in Nigeria, and "Storyland" created by the ace-storyteller, Jìmí Ṣólàńkẹ́ on the network of the Nigerian Television Authority International.

Also as part of my field research, I noted that most Yorùbá traditional songs, narratives, proverbs, riddles, dramas, and concerts performed on radio and television reflect the daily experiences and aspiration of the people. In short, I observed that by implementing programming focused on oral literature, media technologies educate the general public. These particular radio and TV productions inform young people about their native language, culture, and history and, as a result, promote appreciation for their rich heritage. Therefore, one can assert that media presentations, underscoring the value of Yorùbá culture, serve as platforms for individual artists to develop verbal art performances and build their plots around local customs and institutions. This process passes invaluable information to the listener, contributes to cultural continuity, and preserves invaluable knowledge for future generations.

Whenever riddle, puzzle, and folktale sessions are performed on radio or television, time-honored objectives take high priority: listeners are "tested," especially young listeners, on environmental studies, history, culture, language, religion, politics, health, and so on. This is precisely what a broadcasting station in Ọ̀yọ́ State has accomplished with

its programming. Contestants choose envelopes containing riddles or puzzles and are awarded points for each correct answer. The points are then converted into monetary prizes. Given that the program tests the contestants' knowledge regarding various aspects of Yorùbá culture and tradition, both the recording studio audience and viewers at home learn a great deal. Thus, the thematic content of verbal arts in contemporary society has been broadened to reflect the important issues of the day, be they religious, political, or social.

Another type of media impacting the production and nature of Yorùbá oral tradition is film, most especially the Nigerian video film industry (aka Nollywood), which in 2009 was rated the second largest film producer in the world by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), surpassing even Hollywood. Since its debut in the 1980s, the Nigerian film industry has surpassed theater, TV, radio, and photography as Nigeria's favored entertainment genre. Solidly rooted in the oral tradition of the people, while also borrowing from foreign literary and film cultures, Nigerian cinema is an intersection of various arts forms; as such, it dramatically mirrors the human condition with all its beauty and cruelty. Titles are produced in English and major indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá.

My personal interest is in Yorùbá film, which pioneered video recording in Nigeria.[21] These are films that depict ancient and modern realities of the Yorùbá world while preserving linguistic richness and complexity. In the films *Ṣaworoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwọ̀*, for example, verbal, gestural, and symbolic elements combine to highlight the use of tongue-twisters, folktales, folk-songs, song-riddles, legends, and the like. While the art and aesthetics of Ifá divination is most often used to generate and resolve conflicts in the plot of many films, oral poetic forms like song-riddles, puzzles, *oríkì* (praise poetry/attributive epithets), *rárà* (ballad), *òkú pípè,* (dirge/elegy), *ìjálá* (hunters' chant), *ẹ̀sà pípè* (masque performers' chant), *Ṣàngó pípè* (Sàngó's attributive epithets/praise poetry), and *ọfọ̀* (incantation) are also intriguing communicative resources explored by Yorùbá filmmakers. Yorùbá screenwriters and producers regularly reach back to their culture's past to connect with, and offer perspective on, the present. This past/present integration is exemplified in the film *Agogo Èèwọ̀*, which highlights a specific type of Yorùbá song-riddle known as *ìmọ́* (see chapter four for a detailed discussion of this genre). In this film the screenwriter uses the Yorùbá lampoon tradition as an instrument for exposing modern-day evils perpetrated by the Nigerian political class. In this

way serious political issues regarding postcolonial Nigeria are clothed in playful script:

Mo pẹ́yẹ́kẹ́yẹ́.
Mo pàfẹ̀káfẹ̀.
Mo róhun fún Nànná.
Nànná lá èé jẹ̀yí.
Mo ni: "taa níí jẹ́ẹ́?"
Ó l'Ọlọ́jà ni.
Mo rèé f' Ọlọ́jà.
Ọlọ́jà gbà á,
Ó sọ ọ́ sẹ́nu káló!
Ó dijọ́ keje,
Wọ́n ránni délé.
Mo léèétirí?
Wọ́n l Ọlọ́jà kú!
Mo lásọ kín lẹ fi sin ín?
"Asọ àlà ni,
Àtẹ́ran abìwo,
Èèrà abẹ̀dọ̀,
Igba òkúta."
Mo ra gèlè,
Mo ra kíjìpá,
Láyé Abíọ́dún.
Abíọ́dún ọmọ Òṣékelé lọ́wọ́,
Abíọ́dún ọmọ Ọ̀làǹbà lẹ́sẹ̀.
Wọ́n ní ó ká roko
Rèé yàgbàdo,
Àgbàdo kọ́ ọ lẹ́sẹ̀,
Ó dákú!
Ikú ló dá ọ,
Tàbárùn ni?
Èkúté ilé fò sókè;
Kannakánná patẹ́ pòó
Ìyá olórìṣà bujó mọ̀ọ́!
Kí ní ń jẹ́ mọ̀ọ́?
Moládé.
Kí ní ń jádé?
Adéṣípò.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ ipò?
Pòṣéẹ́rẹ́.

Kí ní ń jẹ́ ṣẹ̀ẹ́ṛẹ́?
Ìṣẹ́ṛẹ́ Ọmọ́yọ.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ Ọmọ́yọ?
Ọmọ́yọ Àkòko.
Kí ní ń jákòko?
Àkòko ìbalẹ̀.
Kí ní ń jẹ́ balẹ̀?
Ìbalẹ̀ òkúsẹ̀hìndé.
Pàǹdi-pandi etí ṛẹ.
Má bi mí mọ́!
(I killed a strange old bird.
I also killed a strange bush rat.
I gave them to Nànà.
Nànà said they were not to be eaten.
I asked: "who could dare eat them?"
She (Nànà) said, "Ọlọ́ja (the king) does."
So I went and presented them to, Ọlọ́ja.
Ọlọ́ja accepted them,
He swallowed them up in one gulp!
On the seventh day,
They came searching for me at home.
I asked: Why? What for?
They said Ọlọ́ja (the king) was dead!
I asked, what garment was his shroud?
"White muslin cloth,
Along with a horned animal,
A pack of livered ants,
And two-hundred rocks," they answered.
I purchased a head covering,
I bought myself a pair of *kíjìpá* trousers,
During the life of (king) Abíọ́dún, it was.
Abíọ́dún, son of crafty-handed, large-footed Òṣékelé,
Abíọ́dún, son of Ọ̀làǹbà.
They invited him to go to farming
To harvest ears of corn,
But the cornstalks tripped him,
And caused him to faint!
Did death threats come calling?
Or was it some disease that took hold?
The house rat made a leap;
The Pied Crow bird caw-cawed

And the Òrìṣà Priestess did dance even more!
"*Mọ̀ọ́,*" to dance more, means what?
Means "*mọ̀ọ́*" as in *Mọládé.*
Then what emerged?
Adéṣípò did.
What is it that is called "*ipò*?"
As in *Pòṣéẹ́rẹ́.*
What is it that is called *ṣẹ̀ẹ́rẹ́?*
As in *Ìṣẹ́rẹ́ Ọmọ́yọ.*
Ọmọ́yọ, as in what?
Same as in *Ọmọ́yọ Àkòko.*
What is *Àkòko*?
As in *Àkòko ìbalẹ̀.*
Which *ìbalẹ̀?*
Òkúsẹ̀hìndé's *ìbalẹ̀* landing.
You pandy-mandy big, fat ears.
Pray, ask me no more questions!)[22]

According to Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá (1990), who uses a similar material in his novel *Ogún Ọmọdé*, the more we (the children) "wove these silly rhymes and ditties, the more their sheer rhythm delighted and made us giddy, *never mind that none among us had the slightest clue what any of it meant*" (84, emphasis mine).[23] One might assume that Ìṣọ̀lá incorporated this particular song-riddle to ensure preservation of the oral data, to save it from extinction. However, one needs to be mindful that writers occasionally turn to oral materials in order to articulate ideological positions. For instance, in precolonial Yorùbá society, which was predominantly nonliterate, the people used a wide array of taboos, myths, legends, and historical anecdotes in their oral literature. Throughout this process of cultural integration, deep-rooted prejudices were (and continue to be) passed on to the general population, influencing attitudes and viewpoints. This literary tradition, which demystifies the sacred immunity of the Yorùbá king, is highlighted in lines 1–20 of the above excerpt. Ìṣọ̀lá borrowed the excerpt from a three-stanza traditional poem that reinforces the supremacy of collective taboos in Yorùbá society. *Nàná*, mentioned in lines 3 and 4, is the symbol of female power associated with witchcraft, which plays a prominent role in creating taboos and maintaining social mores in Yorùbá society.[24]

The poem's relevance to Ìṣọ̀lá's ideological position in his film *Agogo Èèwọ̀* is monumental. The film juxtaposes the story of postindependent Nigerian society with a play about a precolonial Yorùbá political

institution. This purposeful juxtaposition is necessary to shine the spotlight on contemporary society and create an apt analogy. In brief, just as a precolonial Yorùbá king could not be spared when denouncing long-honored cultural aspects of traditional society, contemporary leaders must not be allowed to get away with committing atrocities and demonstrating incompetent, corrupt, and deceitful behaviors. Such behaviors reflect unacceptable insensitivity to the plight of the masses. Ìṣọ̀lá uses his film as a warning that such leaders should be removed from office, arraigned before a court of law, and punished accordingly if found guilty. Any screenwriter(s) of such a film promote a clear message: the future of any free society lies in the hands of its people, and must issue forth from their consciousness, their struggle, and their unalloyed commitment to total independence.

Likewise, lines 21–25 of the same excerpt refer to the oral history of Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire most especially, the prosperous reign of King Abíọ́dún (1774–1789) and subsequent reign of his successor, King Aólẹ̀ Árógangan (1789–1796), an era fraught with crises. Oral tradition and available commentaries on the history of Ọ̀yọ́ confirm that Old Ọ̀yọ́ witnessed peace and progress during the reign of king Abíọ́dún, "the last Aláàfin that really held power in Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire" (Àtàndá, 1973: 28). That might have prompted the reference to the period of his reign as the time when people had money to buy a "head covering" (line 21) and "a pair of *kíjìpá*[25] trousers" (line 22). Evidently the economy of the Abíọ́dún reign was prosperous. However, Aláàfin Aólẹ̀, who succeeded to the throne, was not as fortunate. His tenure was retrogressive and problematic. As a result, many people moved away from Old Ọ̀yọ́ and took refuge elsewhere in the southern part of Yorùbáland. By incorporating this aspect of song-riddle into the story of the film *Agogo Èèwọ̀,* "Ìṣọ̀lá is not just preserving a piece of Old Ọ̀yọ́ history he is also drawing attention to the ongoing mass movement of Nigerians out of the country as a result of unemployment, hunger, insecurity, injustice, and poverty" (Akínyẹmí, 2007: 130).

Thus, video is a means of propagating, preserving, and regenerating the culture. While depicting the conflicts between tradition and modernity, Yorùbá filmmakers also offer models for suitable mediation and healthy adjustment—suggesting strategies for confronting modernity without losing the best aspects of tradition. More than any other mode of cultural representation, video provides an expansive panorama of Yorùbá society, the people, and their culture; video affords an opportunity to examine what transpires when sophisticated technology meets up with a society that is, at best, still groping its way toward modernity. In truth, despite modern technology's ubiquitous presence in Yorùbá society, many

individuals still retain worldviews and perspectives that run counter to those put forward by science and technology. For instance, some individuals still perceive many challenges inherent in our human condition as having been purposefully conjured by a supernatural agency—obstacles that may be solved, understood, or cured only through the powerful use of magical talismans or incantations. While anyone attending a "Spiderman" movie understands the hidden technology behind each dazzling scene, the mental state of the Yorùbá might tend to associate such phenomena in an indigenous movie with unseen forces or spirits.

Such attitudes and worldviews inform how the Yorùbá receive and make use of foreign technologies. Surprisingly, a mutually beneficial and dynamic interaction between technology and tradition is possible. For example, when intersecting with video film, oral traditions may move in new directions (and even change some of their outer forms), yet concomitantly maintain a unique essence and originality. However, as Wọlé Ògúndélé (2000) warns, "What we are witnessing now is not so much technology at the service of tradition, but its opposite: tradition at the service of technology" (98). What one would have wished for is a mutually beneficial and dynamic exchange between the two, but the cash nexus—the driving force behind video productions—is preventing this outcome. Furthermore, the power of mass production and consumption inevitably taints the final product. One can only hope that, in future, interaction between tradition and technology takes a more favorable direction.

Enigmatic Modes on the Internet

Few would argue that, thanks to the Internet and all its permutations, we are now all inhabitants of a global village. Across the planet, cultures influence and shape one another on a daily basis. As might be expected, oral tradition, too, is impacted by the relatively new interconnectedness among cultures and by the versatility of information technology. As far as Yorùbá oral tradition is concerned, the effects are twofold: archival- and research-oriented. That is, opportunities now abound to store and/or retrieve information concerning Yorùbá oral tradition on computer networks. For example, a Google search of "Yorùbá riddles and puzzles" yields approximately two million results. When one enters the phrase "Yorùbá oral tradition," Google provides over four million results! In short, the growing presence of literacy and technical media are increasingly impacting both the context and production of oral communication, whether in mundane or artistic forms.

One of the most salient features of the Internet and World Wide Web revolution is the proliferation of websites and online discussion groups. Many sites and groups interested in oral traditions have been set up by African diaspora associations (which include exile, transnational, emigrant, expatriate, asylum, and refugee communities), as well as by individuals who see themselves as purveyors of African culture and traditions. A close scrutiny of the original content and format of these sites and online groups reveals that they were initially established to provide, and to facilitate the exchange of, sociopolitical and economic information among targeted individuals and members of diasporic communities—information written exclusively in the languages of former colonial masters, including English, French, and Portuguese (Merolla, 2005: 101). Today, however, these online sites are more likely to use indigenous languages and their content is more focused on the exchange and dissemination of cultural information regarding various African ethnic groups. In fact, some of these sites are written solely in African languages. This implies that the sites are increasingly expressing and constructing awareness of specific collective ethnocultural identities (Miller and Slater, 2000).

The alternatives presented by this technological revolution address specific diasporic and exile communities, transnational diasporic communities, and African and global audiences. These online sites include "what is excluded by other media sources and demonstrate creative use of technology, they challenge the views presented in other sources, and they provide services for and work to organize and mobilize diaspora communities" (Biersteker, 2010: 151). As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) observed, the Internet is characterized by the integration of various media and it offers a variety of "remediations" in the sense that its elements and forms are borrowed from, and depend upon, other media. In other words, when searching for information online, we have multiple options: to read it as an illustrated book, listen to it as a radio, and/or watch it as television, film, or video. Furthermore, we can also interact with *all* these different media and freely shift from one to the other. As mentioned earlier, not only are these media able to host different forms of orality, but they also hold potential for offering new and relevant information regarding orality. In this respect, it is important to recall the so-called shift from orality to literacy, the study of oral elements in written texts, and the transition of oral genres to print and electronic media.

Given that different forms and traces of orality are found on the Internet (where various media are recycled and integrated), "we can speak of 'dimensions of orality' on websites; that is, of forms and traces

of orality that are characterized by the 'remediation' of the World Wide Web" (Merolla, 2005: 102–103). When examining the locations of Yorùbá oral tradition on the Internet (and by that I mean its spatial and discursive positions), one needs to pay particular attention to the language(s) used on these sites. Most websites and online discussions targeting Sub-Saharan Africans are typically monolingual, mostly in English, French, or Portuguese, depending on the colonial experience of the organizations or individuals responsible for the sites. Nevertheless, there is also space for indigenous African languages, which assume the role of indicators and identity. Some sites articulate language policies that encourage use of indigenous languages. Others, such as the Yorùbá online discussion group "Tiwa-N-Tiwa," insist that its members only use the Yorùbá language:

> *Fún ìsọjí, ìgbéga àti ìtànkálẹ̀ èdè Yorùbá…Èdè aládùn yìí nìkan ni àwa tí a wà nínú ẹgbẹ́ yìí yóò máa kọ sí ara wa. A kò fẹ́ Gẹ̀ẹ́sì, Faransé tàbí èdèkédè, bíkòṣe Yorùbá.*
> (For the revival, progress, and development of Yorùbá…This is the only acceptable language for communication by members of this discussion group. We do not want English, French, or any other language, except Yorùbá).

Websites like this present a wide range of content in indigenous languages and also provide access to instructional materials and sources of information about specific languages. What clearly distinguishes such online sites from other alternative Internet news sources focused on Africa is their emphasis on arts and culture. In reference to oral genres specifically, much can be ascertained about the value placed on such traditional arts by the spatial allocation provided and by the positioning of these genres within the site's discursive construction. Analyzing these factors affords significant clues about the sites' commitment to cultural identity. Verbal arts, whether transcribed, audio recorded, or filmed, are often placed online in an almost standard format. Similarly, once oral genres are uploaded online, they appear as fixed expressions in the mother tongue, with or without translations.

One also notices that the visibility of references to oral genres depends on the position in which hyperlinks to literary subpages are placed. These hyperlinks lead to pages where one finds different aspects of oral tradition such as arts and culture—chants and poetry, songs and music, proverbs, riddles and puzzles, art and crafts, and oral narratives like folktales, tale-riddles, myths, and so on. In most cases, the short oral literary genres like proverbs, regular riddles, and songs are presented in the original Yorùbá

and translated into English. But the more elaborate oral narratives like folktales (including tale-riddles), poetry and short stories, and cultural information on history, naming ceremonies, arts and crafts, and the like, are almost always written in English.

A new trend in the location of orality on these sites is the inclusion of video clips of songs, chants, riddles, story- or tale-telling sessions that are offered in audio-visual form, thus reproducing oral communication. More importantly, thousands of samples of oral genres, documentaries on different aspects of African culture, and segments of video films are now available to the general public on YouTube. The Internet has thus become a new vehicle for learning and retaining oral genres. This technique may be valued as a new way of preserving oral texts but, equally as important, it may simply function as a temporary domain for orality. The concern centers on the temporary aspect of these "holding" sites. Once an online site is deleted or when data/text from a single webpage is replaced or removed, the material may be lost forever.

Conversely, one may argue that the Internet has helped preserve oral tradition immeasurably; first, by absorbing orality into the flow of global popular culture and second, by extending to orality hitherto unimaginable international recognition. As Karin Barber (2010) rightly argues, "Everywhere in Africa, new genres grew up in the twentieth century, dialogically intertwined with new media technologies, partly stimulated, partly shaped by these technologies—but also significantly affecting the way the media functioned" (9). The question that begs further research is how orality will continue to adapt and function within the modern global world. Oral tradition exists only insofar as society allows it to exist; the fluid interrelationship between context and text permits it to grow. Orality as a cultural and communal expression has never been static. The fact that it is an ever-changing and dynamic art will likely be the key to its survival.

CHAPTER SIX

Orature and Indigenous Education

In terms of educational and recreational value, the importance of orature cannot be overemphasized, whether in Africa or elsewhere. The prevalent myth that formal school systems are the sole custodians of our children's intellectual, physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual development has largely been dismissed. The implication is now obvious to most policymakers that theoretical knowledge without a strong cultural foundation makes for a fragmented approach to education. In other words, we acquire theoretical knowledge in vain if ignoring the conditions of the real world, and the sociocultural ramifications of the reality in which we live. That the Yorùbá culture has a great deal to offer, in terms of educational theory and practice, is indisputable. This is exemplified by unique didactic precepts woven throughout its oral literature. Such educational strategies and materials, meant to inform, influence, and promote positive behaviors, are quite naturally presented in spoken form in communities steeped in oral tradition.

The principles of Yorùbá traditional education are based on the concept of *ọmọlúwàbí* or *ọmọlúàbí*—translated loosely as an "ideal being." In other words, the end product of Yorùbá traditional education is to make every individual *ọmọlúwàbí*. To be *ọmọlúwàbí* is to be of good character. To the Yorùbá, good character implies respect for one's elders and for constitutional authority, loyalty to one's parents and local traditions, honesty in public and private dealings, devotion to duty, readiness to assist the needy and infirm, sympathy, sociability, courage, a burning desire for work, and many other desirable qualities. In essence, the primary goal of Yorùbá traditional education has always been to foster strong character in the individual and to prepare each person to become a useful member of the community. Therefore, traditional education embraces character

building as well as the development of physical skills. Important, too, are the acquisition of moral qualities in both men and women, characteristics considered integral to becoming a productive part of society and contributing to one's community's social milieu in its various forms.

No single society has a monopoly on the correct way of transforming an infant into a productive, sociable adult. The process of nurturing individuals so that they may ultimately step into trustworthy, responsible community roles is most certainly complex. In Yorùbá culture, education is a life-long process and the entire society is the schoolhouse; hence, the essence of the dictum, *ojú mẹ́rin níí bí ọmọ, igba ojú níí wò ó*. (It takes the village to raise a child. Translated literally, only two individuals—represented by "four eyes"—are involved in the conception and birth of a child, but everyone in the society—represented by "two hundred eyes"—participates in the training of the child.) Traditional education in Yorùbá society, according to Láògún Adéoyè (1979: 240–259), begins in the womb! Once a child is conceived, the community, conscious of its responsibility, starts to provide guidance as to what the pregnant mother should eat, how she should sleep, when she should not walk, and so on. All these precautions are taken so that nothing adverse affects the unborn child. When the baby is born, its birth is greeted with unbridled enthusiasm. The importance of children to Yorùbá society cannot be overstated and perhaps forms the basis of love and tenderness with which the child is treated, as does the recognition of her or his worth as an individual. Hence the Yorùbá saying: *Ọmọ nìgbẹ̀yìn ọlà; ọmọ niyì, ọmọ lẹwà. Kí là bá fowó rà bí kò ṣọmọ?* (The child is the end product of wealth; a thing of honor, a thing of beauty. What else should one spend money on other than on one's child/children?)

As the child develops, all efforts are made to ensure her or him a healthy and well-rounded life. From the first day, an infant's cries are interpreted with psychological precision. While s/he is being bathed, her or his parts of the body are gently stretched. S/he is carefully thrown up into the air and caught many times to develop courage early. The mother-child relationship becomes a source of training. The child is loved, cuddled, and remains close to her/his mother throughout life. Such relationships significantly impact the child's social behavior in future.

When it comes to personal hygiene, the mother is an early teacher, continuously emphasizing the principles of health education. To avoid bed-wetting, when the child must urinate, the mother makes "shhhh" sounds, teaching the child to urinate appropriately outside the bed.

When the child grows up, if s/he is still bed-wetting, the parents, relatives, and even playmates respond by singing different forms of deterrence songs such as *tọ̀ọ́lé-tọ̀ọ́lé olódò, kọ̀ǹkọ̀ bomi sẹ́ja lẹ́nu…lágbájá tọ̀ọ́lé o, ó rin gbindin* (the mighty bed-wetter, the toad that puts water in the mouth of the fish…*lágbájá* (the child in question) bed-wets, and the bed was completely soaked). As a toddler, the child is encouraged to develop physical strength; for example, if s/he is either a late developer or just needs help in attempting to walk, the mother sings a song of encouragement: *Tẹ̀ẹ̀tẹ́ o, ríríìn là ń rìn o; bá ò bá rìn, ebi níí pani o*. (Gently, it is compulsory to walk; if one fails to walk, one is beaten by hunger.) In other words, the child is taught early in life the importance of making concerted efforts in order to achieve important goals.

As discussed in the first chapter, Yorùbá children and teenagers participate in numerous game songs that assist in physical development. In the example of *Ẹ bá mi gbọ́ndò yí gbẹ* (Help me scoop this stream dry), while the children are singing, they continuously and vigorously swing their arms from side to side as if they are scooping water from a lake, river, or stream. The refrain of the song is comprised of two words: *jangbala* and *jùgbú*. *Jangbala* is a phonaesthetic word representing a person's hands diligently scooping water as they move from side to side. *Jùgbú*, on the other hand, is purposefully onomatopoeic to imitate the sound of a heavy object dropping into water. This is one form of orature, therefore, that exercises parts of the body (in this case, the arms), thereby contributing to a child's physical development.

In terms of linguistic aptitude, different forms of the Yorùbá song-riddle, as discussed in chapter four, are of paramount importance in supporting a child's development. Similarly, in other verbal genres such as the tongue twister, particular attention is paid to creating difficult phonemes that help improve a child's speech production and enunciation. The following two examples demonstrate this phenomenon: *ọ̀pọ̀bọ gbọ́bọ bọ̀gbẹ́, ò fìrù ọ̀bọ bọ̀bọ lẹ́nu bó ò bá tètè gbọ́bọ bọ̀gbẹ́, ọ̀bọ ó gbé ọ bọ̀gbẹ́* (The one who killed the monkey and hid it in the forest, who also hid the monkey's tail in its mouth if you fail to swiftly hide the monkey in the forest, the monkey will turn around to hide you in the forest.) and *mo pàdàbà lábà alábà, mo bá alábà lábà; n ò fálábà ládàbà jẹ* (I killed a red-eyed turtledove in someone else's hut. I met the owner in the hut, but I did not share the turtledove with the owner). In each of these two examples, the aesthetic significance of rhythm overrides their meaning. Training of the child's linguistic competence is not restricted to tongue twisters alone, but is also developed through recitation of song-riddle dialogues presented in musical form.

To repeat, one cannot emphasize strongly enough how integral Yorùbá traditional education is to the building of a young person's character. Multiple traits and characteristics are emphasized: honesty, morality, intelligence, knowledge, diplomacy, respect for customs and tradition, and so on. According to Timothy Adédèjì Awóníyì (1975), "nothing mortifies a Yorùbá more than to say that her or his child is '*àbíìkọ́*' (a child that is born but not taught). A child is better *'àkọ́ọ̀gbà*' (a child that is taught but does not learn), where the responsibility is that of the child and not her or his parents" (375). Therefore, as has been previously discussed, a variety of deterrence oral poetry or songs are employed in Yorùbá society as effective means of censoring bad habits in their children. This strategy proves especially effective, for example, during or after a display of unruly behavior by a child at a storytelling session.

A combination of other methods is equally vital to the training of young persons in Yorùbá culture. From childhood, girls and boys are taught by example and direct instruction, as well as through riddles, proverbs, myths, legends, folktales, songs, poems, and stories. The recitation of moonlight stories is one such method that extols the virtues of Yorùbá society. These stories, told in different forms such as tale-riddles, folktales, or trickster tales are used to explain rules and restrictions, as well as proper etiquette of daily life. In addition to their entertainment value, moonlight stories also convey important moral lessons to audience members and most especially, to the children. Storytelling has been used effectively across human history to instruct children, to sharpen their critical thinking skills, and to shape their behaviors. In this tradition, the moonlight tales have proven to be an essential educational tool. In sum, children literature, in the words of Vivian Yenika-Agbaw (2008), "does not simply educate and entertain, but can also create possibilities for children. This is because images embedded in stories and illustrations can or do define reality for most children" (111).

Regrettably, however, individuals responsible for creating formal education curricula in Africa have not adequately exploited the potential of orature. This is most evident at the preschool and elementary (primary) school levels. What if, early in life, *all* pupils were introduced to the various forms of verbal arts, such as riddles, game songs, deterrence songs, and folktales? Would they not be delighted with these amusing genres, as well as better acculturated?

This book has provided an in-depth analysis of the riddle, demonstrating its relevance to Yorùbá society. For centuries the riddle has proven an effective instrument for imparting knowledge to young people, and has supported parents in raising children to become responsible,

useful members of their communities. What we are facing now, unfortunately, is the gradual disappearance of riddling, especially among highly Westernized and urbanized families. Modern life has placed new time demands on families and, as a result, many Yorùbá parents have abandoned this noble custom. Individuals in the upper echelons of society, especially, can hardly remember the oral performances, let alone teach them to their children. Factors contributing to this breakdown of tradition include lack of fluency in the mother tongue and the overbearing influence of modern communications media, including radio, television, video players, video games, computers, iPads, smart phones, and so on.

What is needed is an immediate and systematic collection of additional genres of oral literature. Furthermore, when possible, such collections should be digitized.[1] This is critically important for the simple reason that children need continued access to oral literature; they need to be able to perform it, read about it in their books, listen to riddles on audio recordings, and watch videos of masterful riddling performances. Children deserve and need exposure to the cardinal virtues of life, all of which are inherent in riddling. After all, the virtues that contribute to strength of character will inform and influence their future happiness. Inarguably, the worth of an individual (i.e., nobility of character) cannot be measured in terms of the number of diplomas or certificates received. Curriculum planners, educators, and administrators in Africa would be wise, once and for all, to incorporate elements of traditional education into formal school curricula. It is only then that the present clamor for a cultural reawakening will achieve desirable results.

NOTES

1 Yorùbá Riddles in Performance: Content and Context

1. On the problem of riddle definition, see especially Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman (eds.) *Untying the Knots: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 3–9; Charles T. Scott "On Defining the Riddle: The Problem of a Structural Unit." *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976, pp. 77–92; and Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes, "Toward a Structural Definition of Riddle," *Journal of American Folklore*, 76 (1963): 111–118.
2. In some other African communities, when participants are completely baffled by the riddle, resolution is reached in unique ways. For example, among various Fulani groups in West Africa, D.W. Arnott, in "Proverbial Lore and Word-Play of the Fulani" *Africa*, 27 (1957): 379–396, tells us that when a respondent is unable to solve a posed riddle, he or she must "surrender" a town. A similar but more interesting use of the town element has been reported for the Swahili by J. L. Kallen and C. M. Eastman in "I went to Mombasa/There I met an Old Man: Structure and Meaning in Swahili Riddles," *Journal of American Folklore*, 92 (1979): 418–444. According to their findings, if a riddle proponent baffles the respondent, the respondent says, "Shall I give you a town?" "Okay," says the proponent, "give me a town." The respondent may offer, for example, Lagos. The proponent then proceeds to tell an impromptu and often completely fictional story about an experience he or she once had on visiting Lagos. This town-story component of the riddle simply "allows riddler, who has successfully baffled an audience with a riddle they could not answer, to further show off creative virtuosity by weaving a story 'on the spot,' based on a town supplied by the audience, and developed by the riddler so that it will embed the riddle's answer" (422).
3. This process differs in some other African cultures, as recorded by C. M. Doke in "Bantu Wisdom-Lore," *African Studies*, 6 (1947), "If the accepter is able to solve the riddle, the first must put forth another until he baffles the second. If the second is then unable to answer, he puts forth a counter-riddle, until he in turn baffles the

first, when the first has to answer his obscure riddle and the second likewise. They are then quits, and start over again" (117).

4. The original Yorùbá version of this lenghty text is not included in the book because of space limitation. The performance itself was recorded in the evening of October 21, 2012, at Gẹ́gẹ́ Compound in Ilọra (near the city of Ọ̀yọ́) after dinner. The group consists of children in the neighborhood of my host during the fieldwork, Mr. Abíọ́lá Kẹ́hìndé.
5. The palm-kernel normally possesses a hard, wood-like shell that is very often difficult to crack.
6. In the riddle, the mouth is the small room, while the teeth are the sharp pegs.
7. This is because the garment is supported by the shoulders of its wearer and usually reaches only her or his neck.
8. Dead old leaves of banana plants are often found at the base of the mother plant, or seen hanging along the plant's trunk.
9. The mushroom fungus normally has a single umbrella-like leaf and a lone stem.
10. The oval shaped fruits of the pawpaw (papaya) are normally found crowded around the upper part of the plant—between the leaves and the trunk of the plant.
11. The snail is housed in a metal-like, oval-shaped shell that resembles a little clay pot. Usually, the creature stays in its shell and hides under the leaves of a bush.
12. This type of brown ant moves together in thousands, crossing footpaths throughout the day, and biting unsuspecting passersby.
13. The hare is a fleet-footed game animal, ever ready to run; the bush-fowl (partridge) is a very vigilant bird, ever ready to fly; and the antelope is a game animal with a big, bulky head.
14. *Ìròmi* is an insect that lives on river water, always flitting here and there as if desperately looking for something.
15. Here, the storyteller is using wordplay—"a juxtaposition of lexical items which are somehow similar in shape to produce an effect of verbal dexterity" in the words of Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí, *Features of Yorùbá Oral Poetry*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): University Press Limited, 1984, p. 37. The name adopted by Tortoise "*Ẹ̀yìnọ̀la*" and supposedly the last statement made by the deceased "*Ta ló mẹ̀yìn ọ̀la? Kò sẹ́ni tó mẹ̀yìn ọ̀la*," may sound similar phonetically but are actually unrelated.
16. *Orò* means habit or tradition. It is used in this riddle performance as a metaphor to reiterate the fact that tradition must not die, and that every participant at the moonlight storytelling session must ensure the survival of riddle-folktale performance.
17. Apart from books on riddles, some of the other books published with the help of these sociocultural organizations, according to Afọlábí Ọlábímtán "A Critical Survey of Yorùbá Written Poetry 1848–1948," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Lagos, Lagos (Nigeria), 1974a, pp. 22–53 are A. K. Ajísafẹ́'s *History of Abẹ́òkúta* (1921), *Gbádébọ̀ Aláké* (1921), *The Laws and Customs of the Yorùbá People* (1924), and *Ìwé Ìtàn Abẹ́òkúta* (1924); I. B. Akínyẹlé's *Ìwé Ìtàn Ìbàdàn àti Ìwó, Ìkìrun àti Òṣogbo* (1911), D. O. Ẹpẹ́gà's *Ifá* (1908) and *The Mystery of the Yorùbá Gods* (1932); E. M. Líjàdù's *Ifá* (1897), *Òrúnmìlà* (1907), *Àwọn Àròfọ̀-Orin ti Ṣóbọ̀ Aróbíodu àti ti Oyèsilẹ̀ Kẹ́ríbo* (1902), and *Ìwé Kejì Àwọn Àròfọ̀ Orin ti Ṣóbọ̀ Aróbíodu* (1906); J. B. O. Lósì's *The History of Abẹ́òkúta* (1924); D. A. Ọbasá's *Ìwé Kínní ti Àwọn Akéwì—Yorùbá Philosophy*

(1927), *Ìwé Kẹjì ti Àwọn Akéwì—Yorùbá Philosophy* (1934), and *Ìwé Kẹta ti Àwọn Akéwì—Yorùbá Philosophy* (1945); T. A. J. Ògúnbíyì's *Ìwé Ìtàn Ifá, Agbigba, Yanrìn-Títẹ̀ àti Owó Ẹ́ẹ́rìndínlógún* (n. d.); M. I. Ògúmẹ́fu's *Yorùbá Legends* (1929); J. E. S. Ògúji's *Àròfọ̀ D'òwe* (1944) and *Àròfọ̀ Aláwídọ̀la* (1946); J. Òjó-Cole's *A Collection of Yorùbá Thoughts* (1931); Ṣóbọ̀ Aróbíodu (Josiah Ṣóbọ̀wálé Ṣówándé)'s *Àwọn Àròfọ̀-Orin Ti Ṣóbọ̀ Aróbíodu* series (1910, 1913, 1917, 1920, 1929, 1930, and 1934); and Olúṣẹ́gun Ṣówándé's *Àwọn Àròfọ̀-Orin ti Olúṣẹ́gun Ṣówándé, ọmọ Ṣóbọ̀ Aróbíodu* (1938).

18. In its oldest usage, the term *semeiotica* was applied to the study of the physiological symptoms induced by particular body states and changes. According to Marcel Danesi, *Of Sigarettes, High Heels, and Other Interesting Things: An Introduction to Semiotics*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 17, Hippocrates, the founder of Western medical science, defined symptoms as the *sema* (*sings* in Greek) of these states and changes. Hippocrates' term was introduced into philosophical inquiry by the British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, in which he defined *semeiotics* as the "doctrine of signs." At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) used the term *semiology* to refer to the science he thought would become the systematic study of all sign systems. Today, Hippocrates' original term, now spelled *semiotics*, is preferred.

2 Riddles and Metaphors: The Creation of Meaning

1. All the 133 regular riddles (*àlọ́ àpamọ̀*) cited in this chapter were collected in a fairly leisurely manner among the various Yorùbá dialectal groups at different times (mostly in summer) between 2007 and 2012 during the fieldwork for this book project. Most of the riddles form part of the moonlight storytelling sessions that I observed and recorded during the fieldwork.
2. "Witches" is used as a metaphor for the heat generated by these spicy plants. For a detailed discussion of the concept of witchcraft in Yorùbá society, see Teresa N. Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts,* Indiana and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 10.
3. *Ìjálá*, a type of Yorùbá oral poetry, is normally performed by the hunters in a high-pitched chanting mode. For detailed discussion on the subject, see Adébóyè Babalọlá, *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, pp. 3–84.
4. One constant feature of Muslim clerics (known as Imams) is their beard. The metaphor in the riddle is the comparison of the long hair in the chin of a he-goat to the beard of a Muslim cleric.
5. Muslims are in the habit of observing Islamic prayers five times every day as one of the five pillars of Islam, with the first scheduled for 5 a.m. and the last at 8 p.m. The other four pillars are to recite the Shahadah, a confession of allegiance to Allah and to Muhammad, his messenger; fast regularly, especially during the month of Ramadan—abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual relation during daylight hours; give alms of 2.5 percent of a person's net worth, primarily to the poor; and make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime, provided one can afford it financially and is healthy enough to do so.

6. *Ìrókò*: African teak (*Chlorophoral Excelsa* [*Moraceae*]). The fresh sapwood is often quite yellow. The heartwood is greenish to nut-brown, becoming dark-chocolate or red-brown in time. It is hard and durable and thus, is antproof: it is much used for furniture.
7. *Àràbà*: The white silk cotton tree (*Ceiba Pentandra* [*Bombaceae*]). It is the largest African tree and reaches 100–120 feet in height with a diameter of 4–6 feet.
8. To "water the ground" is used as a metaphor for "to urinate"; because humans generally urinate before excreting feces.
9. There are three prominent systems of divination among the Yorùbá people: These are the Ifá, Ẹẹ́rìndínlógún, and Agbigba. Sometimes they are referred to as Ifá Ọ̀rúnmìlá, Ifá Ẹẹ́rìndínlógún and Ifá Agbigba.
10. The importance of the human factor in the success of a sacrifice is encapsulated in the use of the "mouth" as a metaphor for humans' consumption of sacrifice in this riddle. According to an Ifá verse cited by Wándé Abímbọ́lá *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): Oxford University Press, 1976, "The *ẹ̀sẹ̀ Ifá*…emphasizes the importance of of the human factor in the success of a sacrifice. The story is that of a farmer who wanted to go and take possession of a piece of farmland. He was warned to make sacrifice to Orí (Head), Earth (Ilẹ̀), Eégún (Ancestor god) and Òòṣàńlá (Creation god). He offered the sacrifice but he did not call his neighbours to take part in the sacrifice. He discovered later that things were not all right for him on his farm. He then went back to his Ifá priests and told them his plight. His Ifá priests asked him whether he offered all the required sacrifice and he answered in the affirmative. But when they asked him whether he made sacrifice to *Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀, baba ẹbọ*, he said that he did not know what was so called. Then, his Ifá priests told him that people's mouths are meant by the term *Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀, baba ẹbọ*" (37).
11. However, acceptable use of ribald language is permitted during some festivals. This provides the people with a liminal space for otherwise forbidden performances as respite from their highly regulated lives. For instance, participants at the Òkèebàdàn festival in Ìbàdàn, Òrògbo festival in Ẹ́rínmọ̀pé Èkìtì, and Òpèlú festival in Ọ̀wọ̀, are in the habit of discussing sex, sexuality, and sexual organs openly in public. During these festivals, people exhibit ribald sexual vocalizations and graphic sexual demonstrations with props that resemble genitalia. Ribald language is also common among *ẹ̀sà*, *ìjálá*, and *ẹ̀fẹ̀* chanters/singers.
12. *Bẹ̀ńbẹ́* is s type of large round drum, often used as an accompaniment in the *dùndún* talking drum ensemble.

3 The Dynamics of Tale-Riddling

1. According to Roger Abrahams in his essay entitled "Between the Living and the Dead." *Folklore Fellows Communication*, 225 (1980), "The neck-riddle is…so named because it is embedded within the tale of a prisoner who saves his neck by propounding a riddle which his executioner cannot answer. Characteristically, these riddles are proposed by an actor within the story and relate to events which have happened to him or which he has seen and are therefore insoluble to anyone who has not witnessed the events described" (8–9).

2. Ifá is at the center of Yorùbá tradition, and narrative is the vehicle through which Ifá's message is communicated to clients. As part of the Ifá experience, stories are shared concerning a protagonist, the problems s/he faces, and how s/he resolves (or fails to resolve) these problems. As confirmed by Wándé Abímbọ́lá, *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹnu Ifá* (*Apá Kìíní*), Collins: Glasgow, 1969, pp. 75–83 and William Bascom *Ifá Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1969, p. 131, some narratives that one has heard as fictional folktales often occur in the Ifá corpus. However, it is important to distinguish Ifá narratives from the same stories relayed through folktales. In Ifá, the stories are useful due to their symbolism; their underling truisms assist clients facing real, life-altering situations. These same stories fall under the category of folktale when they are narrated and responded to as purely fictional. The distinctive element, therefore, is the situation; that is, the context of narration. William Bascom "Relationship of Yorùbá Folklore to Divining." *Journal of American Folklore*, 56(220) (1943): 127–131 has discussed this ambivalence. One might easily (and perhaps correctly) speculate that folktales were born out of the Ifá ritual.
3. The original Yorùbá version of this lenghty text is not included in the book because of space limitation. This tale was first collected from Chief Ṣùpọ̀ Kòṣémáni (now deceased) in Ìbàdàn, Ọ̀yọ́ State, Nigeria, on July 2, 2011. Some variants were later collected from other storytellers in Òṣogbo, Ògbómọ̀ṣọ́, Ìwó, and Ọ̀yọ́, however, none is as detailed as the version cited here.
4. The original Yorùbá version of this lenghty text is not included in the book because of space limitation. This tale was first collected from Chief Ṣùpọ̀ Kòṣémáni (now deceased) in Ìbàdàn, Ọ̀yọ́ State, Nigeria, on July 2, 2011. Although we have here the poetic performance of the tale, it is important to mention that this same tale-riddle was performed in prose by another narrator at a different occasion.
5. *Àrọ̀* is also known by other names such as *ìmọ́* among the Ìjèṣà-Yorùbá, *pẹ́rọ̀ọ́* among the Ẹ̀gbá-Yorùbá, and *wárọ́wàrọ̀* among the Èkìtì-Yorùbá. Adébóyè Babalọlá, "Àrọ̀: A Minor Genre of Yorùbá Spoken Art," paper presented at the Ninth West African Languages Congress, held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 1970, identifies three types of the genre: "the versified wordplay type; the chain-reaction folktale type in segmented prose; and…the tall story type in ordinary prose," however, our discussion in this chapter is devoted to the last two only. The analysis of the "versified wordplay type" (which we prefer to identify as song-riddle) is done separately in the next chapter.
6. *Ẹ̀kọ* is a type of food prepared from corn starch. It could be in either solid or liquid form. In its solid form, it is usually made in lumps wrapped with leaves.
7. *Iyán* is a type of food made from pounding of cooked yam.
8. *Ọkà* is yam-flour pudding.
9. This Ifá poetic tale-riddle was collected from Babalọlá Ifátóògun (now deceased), an Ifá priest based in Ìlobù, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria on August 2, 2007. Also see for comparison a similar tale published in Wándé Abímbọ́lá's, *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá*. Paris: UNESCO, 1975, pp. 388–410.
10. These four stories are not presented in the original Yorùbá version in this book because of space limitation. All the tales were collected in Yorùbá on June 22, 2009, from Awótọ́lá Awolọlá, an Ifá priest based in Òkè Gádà area, Ẹdẹ town, Oṣun State, Nigeria.

11. *Àmàlà* is the synonym of *ọ́kà* described earlier in end note 8.
12. The solution to this riddle is as follows: there are actually three women—the grandmother, the granddaughter, and the biological daughter of the grandmother who is also the biological mother of her mother's granddaughter.
13. According to Wándé Abímbọ́lá, *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá*, 1975, the Ifá priests' traditional interpretation to the Ogbèwèyìn chapter of Ifá corpus is the following: "Ifá says he sees prospects of fortune for the client. His fortune is plentiful. But this person thinks that all the forecasts made for him are all false. He should hasten to offer sacrifice to his comrades in heaven. Ifá says that as this person is being told his destiny, he would have no confidence in the forecast but will only believe when events turn out according to forecast. Ifá warns the client to have more concern for his own personal affairs and that *he shouldn't disregard whatever is forecast for him by Ifá as Ifá will tell the truth, and the truth only*" (449, my emphasis).

4 The Variability and Function of Song-Riddle

1. This song-riddle was performed by students of Baptist Primary School, Ìwó, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 29, 2007.
2. This song-riddle was performed by students of Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University Primary School, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 2, 2007.
3. This song-riddle was performed by students of Baptist Primary School, Ìwó, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 29, 2007.
4. This song-riddle was performed by students of Baptist Primary School, Ìwó, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 29, 2007.
5. Ọládélé Awóbùlúyì, "On the Structure of Àrọ̀." *African Notes*, 7(1) (1978): 68.
6. This song-riddle was performed by students of Community Primary School, Ayétẹ̀, Ọ̀yọ́ State, Nigeria, and collected on June 12, 2010.
7. For a detailed discussion of this and other major Yorùbá lineages, see Adébóyè Babalọ́lá, *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, pp. 22–38 and 118–163.
8. Adébóyè Babalọ́lá, *Àwọn Oríkì Orílẹ̀*. Collins: Glasgow, 1967, p. 40.
9. This song-riddle was performed by students of Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University Primary School, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 2, 2007.
10. This song-riddle was performed by students of Community Primary School, Ayétẹ̀, Ọ̀yọ́ State, Nigeria, and collected on June 12, 2010. Compare this to a slightly different version of another mnemonic song-riddles that serves as aide-mémoires to help children with counting (the song-riddle was performed by students of Baptist Primary School, Ìwó, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 29, 2007):

*B'a a pód**eni***,	When we count in ones,
Ení lọmọbìnrin ń kawó.	Ladies count (their) money in ones.
*Bá a pó d**èjì***,	When we count in twos,
***Èjì** wọ̀rọ̀kọ̀ ni tàwọn ìbejì.*	Twins are in twos.
*Bá a pó d**ẹ̀ta***,	When we count in threes,
*Ẹran tọ́dẹ bá **ta** là á gbé.*	We can only pack the game killed by the hunter.

*Bá a pó d**ẹ̀rin**,* When we count in fours,
***Ẹ̀rín** ẹni tó burú là á rín.* We can only look down on a bad person.
*Bá a pó d**àrún**,* When we count in fives,
*Ohun a bá **rún** lẹnu là á gbé mì* We can only swallow whatever we chew.
*Bá a pó d**ẹ̀fà**,* When we count in sixs,
***Ìfà** ilé, ì**fà** oko ni tẹ̀rúkọ́ ilé.* The hoe handle draws to itself.
*Bá a pó d**èje**,* When we count in sevens,
*Olúgbọ́n ṣorò, ó k**ìje**;* The festival of Olúgbọ́n lasts seven days.
*Arẹ̀sà ṣorò, ó k**ìje**.* The festival of Arẹ̀sà last seven days.
*Bá a pó d**éjọ**,* When we count in eights,
*Ó-dolú-**jọ**-ǹ-**jọ**:* It's a complete number
Ọ̀rẹ́ jọ mí, mo jọ̀rẹ́ẹ̀ mi. My friend resembles me, I resemble my friend.
*Bá a pó d**ẹ̀sán**,* When we count in nines,
***Ẹ̀sán** ló ní n má sánkú.* It's number nine that prevented us from death.
*Bá a pó d**ẹ̀wá**,* When we count in tens,
*Ọmọ rere **wá** mi **wá**;* Responsible children should come my way.
*Níhìí mo wà, **wá** mi **wá**.* I'm here, come my way
*Owó wá mi **wá**;* Money should come my way.
*Níhìí mo wà, **wá** mi **wá**.* I'm here, come my way.
*Gbogbo ire **wá** mi **wá**;* All good things of life;
*Níhìí mo wà, **wá** mi **wá**.* I'm here, come my way.

It is important to note that the last six lines of the excerpt above is delivered in the Yorùbá hunters' oral poetic high-pitch chanting mode of *ìjálá*. For detailed discussion on the subject, see Adébóyè Babalọlá's, *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá*, pp. 3–84.

11. The song-riddle was performed by students of Community Primary School, Ayétẹ̀, Ọ̀yọ́ State, Nigeria, and collected on June 12, 2010.
12. Excerpt from one of the song-riddles performed by students of Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University Primary School, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, and collected on June 2, 2007.
13. The song-riddle was performed by students of Community Primary School, Ayétẹ̀, Ọ̀yọ́ State, Nigeria, and collected on June 12, 2010.
14. This excerpt is from the praise poetry performed by a freelance oral poet (Àjàó Ọ̀jẹ́làdé) at a wedding reception in Ìlọrin, Kwara State, on December 8, 2012.
15. This excerpt is not oral but a creation of one of the earliest Yorùbá writers, Joseph Fọláhàn Ọdúnjọ in his Yorùbá text for elementary school, *Aláwìyé* (*Ìwé Kẹrin*). London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1958, p. 13.

5 Current Trends in the Use of Enigmatic Forms

1. For more information on the history of the Nigerian army, see Nigerian Army and Education Corps School (NAECS), *History of the Nigerian Army 1863–1992*. Abuja: NAECS, 1992 and Norman J. Minners, *The Nigerian Army 1956–66*. London: Methuen, 1971. This and all other regular riddles (*àlọ́ àpamọ̀*) labelled as "new riddles" in this subsection of chapter five were collected among the various Yorùbá

dialectal groups at different times (mostly in summer) between 2007 and 2012 during the fieldwork for this book project. Most of the riddles form part of the moonlight storytelling sessions that I observed and recorded during the fieldwork.

2. Paulo Farias, "Yorùbá Origins Revisited by Muslims: An Interview with the Arọ́kin of Ọ̀yọ́ and a Reading of the Asl Qaba'il yuruba of Al-Hajj Adam al-Iluri." In Paulo Farias and Karin Barber (eds.), *Self-Assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa*. Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, Birmingham University African Studies Series 2, 1990, pp. 109–147.
3. On the history of the establishment of the Nigerian Police, see Tekena N. Tamuno, *The Police in Modern Nigeria, 1861–1965: Origin, Development, and Role*. Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1970 and Kẹ́mi Rótìmí, *The Police in a Federal State: The Nigerian Experience*. Ìbàdàn: College Press, 2001.
4. This riddle is probably refering to the standing fan or table fan that has three blades and not the ceiling fan that has five blades.
5. In the 1980s, several basic items like sugar, rice, milk, vegetable oil, and so on, were not readily available to the generality of the people as a result of artificial scarcity created by hoarding. Therefore, the then federal government resorted to mass importation of these items for local cosumption, and approved importation licenses to political associates to that effect.
6. The original Yorùbá version of this lenghty text is not included in the book because of space limitation. The tale was collected from Mr. Láídé Adéwálé (now deceased), a very enthusiastic storyteller who was also willing to engage in critical or metacritical discussion of these modern tales. The story was collected on the campus of the Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, on August 2, 2008.
7. Although the Yorùbá version of the story was collected from Dr. Moses Òkè (now deceased) on the campus of the Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ University, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, in the summer of 2010, the tale was probably created soon after the December 31, 1983, military coup that ousted the 1979–1983 civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The original Yorùbá version of this urban tale-riddle is not included in the book because of space limitation. For the history of military revolt in Nigeria, see Robin Luckman, *The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt 1960–1967*. Cambridge: University Press, 1971.
8. The original Yorùbá version of this lenghty citation is not included in the book because of space limitation. See Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, *Fàbú: Àkójọpọ̀ Àwàdà*. Ibadan: DB Martoy Books, 2008, pp. 20–26 for the Yorùbá original version.
9. Acceptable use of ribald language is permitted during some festivals in Yorùbáland as a form of social control against certain groups of people. This provides the society with a liminal space for otherwise forbidden performances as respite from their highly regulated lives. For instance, participants at the Òkèebàdàn festival in Ìbàdàn, Òròigbo festival in Ẹ̀rínmọ̀pé Èkìtì, and Òpèlú festival in Ọ̀wọ̀, discuss sex, sexuality, and sexual organs openly in public. During these festivals, people exhibit ribald sexual vocalizations and graphic sexual demonstrations with props that resemble genitalia. Ribald language is also common among *ẹ̀sà*, *ìjálá*, and *ẹ̀fẹ̀* chanters/singers.
10. Ìṣọ̀lá stated this in an interview that I conducted for him on July 24, 2006, in Ìbàdàn.

11. This quotation is from the unpublished manuscript under the title *A Treasury of Childhood Memories*, by Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith, pp 30–41, being the translation of Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's Yorùbá novel entitled *Ogún Ọmọdé*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): University Press Plc., 1990. The Yorùbá version of the quoted section is on pages 19–28 of the original text.
12. *Ẹ̀kọ* is a type of food prepared from corn starch. It could be in either solid or liquid form. In its solid form, it is usually made in lumps wrapped with leaves.
13. *Orín* (often translated as chewing-stick) is a piece of plant stalk or root that is cut into stripes, and chewed at one end of the tip, to be used as the "brush" to clean the teeth.
14. *Ìyèré* (*Piper Guineense*) is West African black pepper. Dried, black berries and even fresh, red fruits are sold in the markets as spices. It is climber on trees and is 30–40 feet long. The fruit is red or red-brown when ripe, but black when dry (see R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yorùbá*. London: University Press Ltd, 1958, p. 334).
15. According to Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yorùbá*, 1958, *eéyọ́ or ọ́ọ́yọ́ "(Corchorus Olitorius/Jew's Mallow—Tiliaceae)* is used as potherb. It has a useful fibre" (533).
16. My personal translation of Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí's Yorùbá poem entitled "Ẹ̀là Lọ̀rọ̀" published in Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí *Ewì Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí (Ìwé Kìíní)*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd, 1982a, pp 23–28.
17. This riddle sounds more Anglo-Saxon than Yorùbá because the play on words and punning in the riddle and its solution is not common in Yorùbá riddle performances.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. The film tradition in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era—starting with the exhibition of the first film in 1903—however, the practitioners of the popular Yorùbá traveling theater are responsible for the transformation of the medium into an independent, commercially viable mode of entertainment and cultural propagation in the postindependence era. This crucial technological-cultural step in the contemporary history of Yorùbá popular culture was taken by Hubert Ògúndé. In the late 1970s, he started producing plays with brief film insertions usually involved fantasy actions or elements (like transformations of human beings into animals) that were meant to convey the supernatural dimensions of Yorùbá cosmology, but which could not be convincingly done on the stage. With Ògúndé's introduction of filmed episodes, a new medium was added; but easy sensationalism produced by little film tricks began to substitute technological illusion for the evocation of mystery, awe, and wonder that audiences had come to expect from their theater. Ògúndé followed this initial and tentative step by making four full-length feature films: *Aiyé* (1979), *Jáíyésinmi* (1980), *Àròpin N Tènìyàn* (1982), and *Àyànmọ́* (1988) on celluloid, which allowed him full scope for the expression of his talent for sensationalism and dazzling spectacle. The experiment with video technology in 1988 by Ìṣọ̀lá Ògúnṣọ́lá, which produced a film version of his Yorùbá stage play—*Àjẹ́ Ni Ìyá Mi*—marked the beginning of a tradition that is still unfolding in different layers almost three decades after. In its almost 30 years of existence, over 7,500 titles in Yorùbá are already produced

and many are still being recorded daily. The themes are close to people's daily reality, even in its depiction of the fantastic, the mysterious, and the outlandish. The magical elements in traditional performances resurface with special effects in video technology. For more on this, see Akíntúndé Akínyẹmí, "Oral Literature, Aesthetic Transfer, and Social Vision in Two Yorùbá Video Films." *Research in African Literatures* 38 (3) (2007): 122–135 and Wọlé Ògúndélé, "Folk Opera to Soap Opera: Improvisations and Transformations in Yorùbá Popular Theater." *Nigerian Video Films*. Ed. Jonathan Haynes. Athens: Ohio State University Center for International Studies, Research in International Studies, Africa Series, Number 73, 2000, pp. 89–147.

22. Lines 8–48 of the translation quoted from the unpublished manuscript under the title *A Treasury of Childhood Memories*, by Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith, pp. 97–99, being the translation of Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's Yorùbá novel entitled *Ogún Ọmọdé*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): University Press Plc., 1990. The Yorùbá version of the quoted section is on pages 83–84 of the original text.
23. This is Pamela J. Olúbùnmi Smith's translation in her unpublished manuscript, *A Treasury of Childhood Memories* (p. 100), being the translation of Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's Yorùbá novel entitled *Ogún Ọmọdé*. Ìbàdàn (Nigeria): University Press Plc., 1990, p. 84.
24. For a detailed discussion of the concept of witchcraft in Yorùbáland, see Teresa N. Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts.* Indiana and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 10.
25. This is a type of handwoven fabric produced from the traditional weaving loom.

6 Orature and Indigenous Education

1. The importance of digitizing oral materials is twofold. First, because of what Vivian Yenika-Agaw, *Representing Africa in Children's Literature: Old and New Ways of Seeing*. New York/London: Routledge, 2008, alludes to as "African Print Literacy Tragedy," a situation referring to children's books as either not available, or poorly produced (111). The few books of higher quality are usually expensive, making access difficult for the average African child. With the public library systems dysfunctional for the most part in almost all African nations, children lack reading opportunities. Second, while one may be genuinely troubled by the "literary barrenness" that is pervasive across continental Africa, a term coined by the Ugandan author Taban lo Liyong (Yenika-Agaw, 125), officials responsible for educational planning should seize the opportunity offered by an evolving e-book culture and by the availability of modern communications media.

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